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**THE IDOMA OF BENUE STATE NIGERIA: THEIR RECEPTION
AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY SINCE 1924.**

EBUTE OBIABO.

**A THESIS PRESENTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

**FOR
THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**



I hereby declare that
this thesis is my own work
and constitutes the result of my own research of the project.

Dedicated
To
Enε, my wife;
and
Obiabo, Achigili, Onyiloko
Oyinebute, Alechenu
and
Achetu
our children

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the end result of what has been for me a great opportunity to study and explore in detail a new area of mission scholarship. I was first introduced to the need for an effective contextualisation of Christianity in the Idoma culture and the cultural process through which Christianity could effectively translate itself into the Idoma context, tradition and needs at a Bible translation workshop conducted by the Rev. Professor Eugene Bunkowske and Dr. Robert Koops at the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos Plateau State Nigeria in July 1981. As I have sought to understand more fully this area of mission scholarship, Dr. Jack Thompson has been my constant source of help, inspiration, and encouragement. His wise counsel and guidance have left their mark on what follows. I am deeply indebted to him for his willing and careful guidance during all the stages that underlie this thesis.

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Finally, I would briefly acknowledge here the great debt I owe to The Most Rev. B.A. Achigili the Methodist Archbishop of the North, Benue Diocese, and The Methodist

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TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the process of Idoma reception and development of Christianity, which was initiated by British Methodist missionaries in 1924. It argues that such a process requires a cultural transformation through which Christianity is re-shaped to suit the Idoma need, custom and traditions thereby regaining the lost cultural cohesion which the Idoma need to adapt Christianity and spread it among themselves. The thesis begins with the reasons for the choice of this study, the aims, purpose and methodology of the research. It calls attention to the need to see the Idoma as subjects of religious change and not merely as objects of evangelisation by overseas missionaries. Another important consideration is that of Idoma ethnicity. Having defined Idoma ethnicity the thesis argues that the question of origin could not be satisfactorily answered from sociological and anthropological investigations alone, but rather through the active participation in the life and culture of one's own people. This leads to a discussion of Idoma theology, which is defined, explained and compared to other types of primal African theology. It is strongly argued that Idoma theology has its sources in Idoma history, language, culture, arts and music, and that its main creeds and beliefs are traditionally passed from one generation to another. Attention is drawn to the overall history of how the Idoma made contact with Christianity, and their reaction to the Methodist missionaries and their early activities. It is argued that, for Christianity to have effectively interacted with the Idoma people, the missionaries should have realised that the Idoma had their own past, religion, culture and tradition which needed to be respected and appreciated.

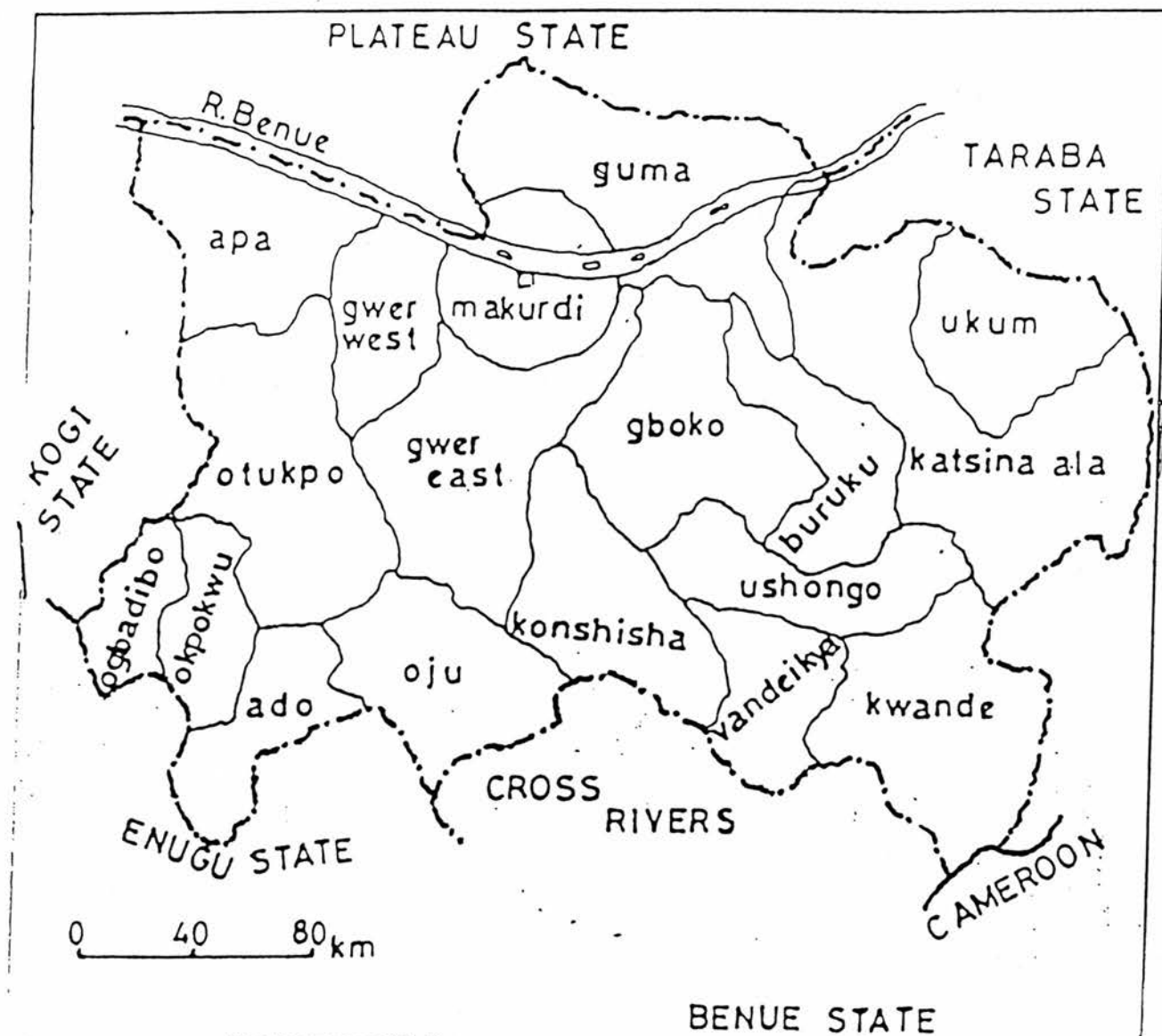
One of the central arguments of the thesis focuses on the spread of Christianity in Idoma and the use of education as an agency of evangelism and church growth. The methods and aims of Methodist mission education in Idoma and the messages that were passed on are critically examined and evaluated. The thesis argues that the Idoma social and economic needs, language, culture, and environments were left out of the missionary educational activities in Idoma, which were tailored primarily at producing teachers, preachers and local missionaries who would spread Christianity in Idoma. The section on Bible translation represents the heart of this thesis, focusing on contextual factors in the reception and development of Christianity in Idoma. The thesis evaluates how the New Testament was translated in comparison to the Old Testament, and argues that the problem of inculturating Christianity into Idoma life has not been sufficiently looked at either scientifically, ethnographically, linguistically, historically or culturally in the New Testament translation. It argues that these problems were better addressed in the more culturally attuned translation of the Old Testament, using the principle of dynamic cultural or natural equivalence translation. The thesis also looks at contemporary Idoma Christianity and the cultural process through which the Idoma have come to terms with Christianity, accepting it as an essential factor of their life and developing Christianity in their concrete historical situation; it concludes that an awareness of the culture, religious beliefs and traditions of a given people are essential components of the successful reception and development of Christianity. Christianity is consistently interconnected to the cultural presuppositions and practices of the culture where it is located. If Christianity is to find expression among any group of people, it can only do so in and through their cultural practices and traditions.

MAP 1: BENUE STATE LOCATION IN NIGERIA

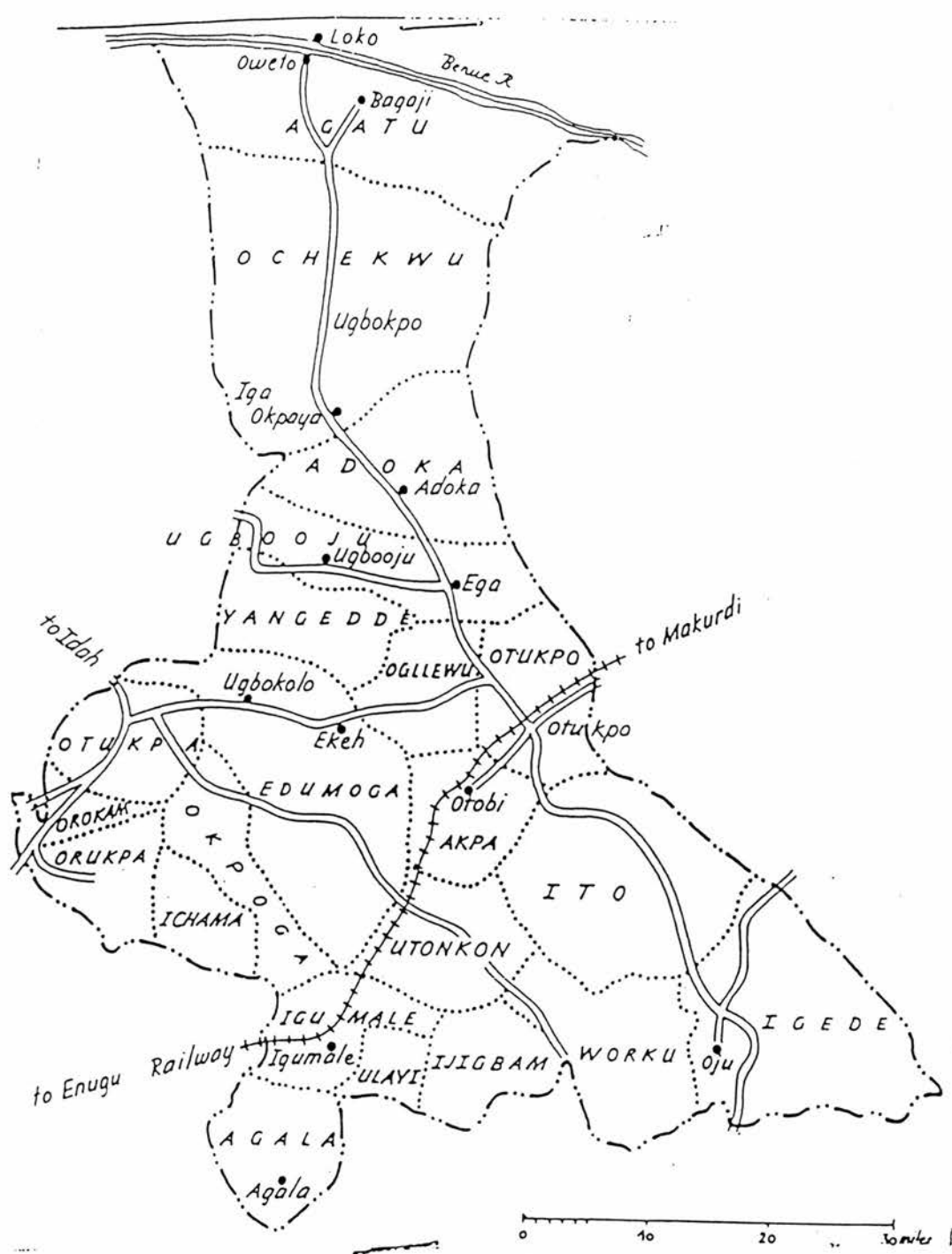


¹ Benue State Government, *Ministry of Information, Youth, Sports and Culture*, Government Press, Makurdi, 1985.

MAP 2: BENUE STATE

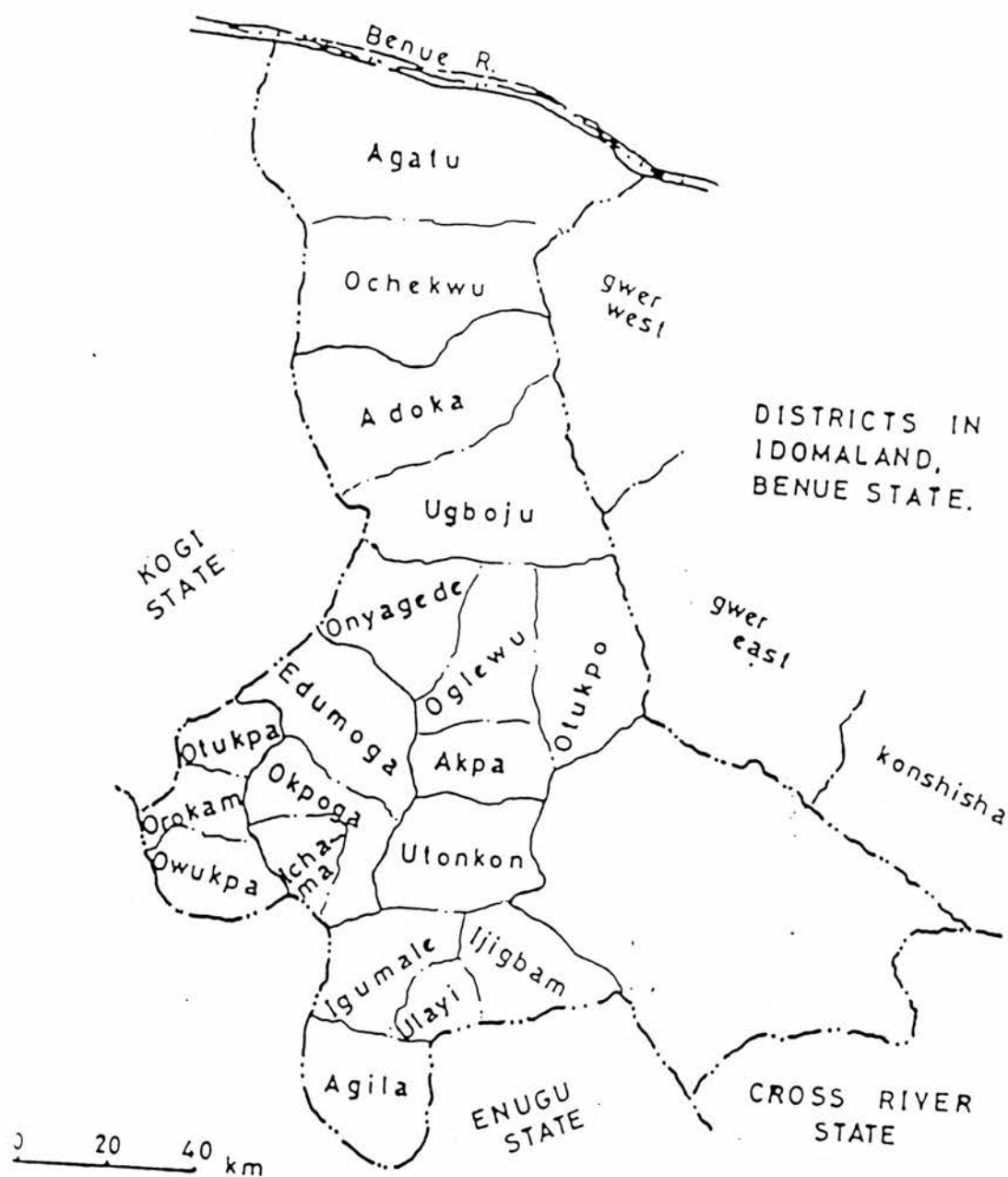
² Ibid.

MAP 3: DIALECTS OF THE IDOMA LANGUAGE



³ Source: R. G. Armstrong, "Idoma-Speaking Peoples", in Daryll Forde (ed.), *The Peoples of the Niger-Benue Conference, West Africa, Part X, Ethnographic Survey of Africa*, London, International African Institute, 1955.

MAP 4: THE IDOMA DISTRICTS



⁴ Source: Otukpo Local Government, *Local Government Ministry of Information, Youth, Sports and Culture, Otukpo*, Government Press, Makurdi, 1985.

A NOTE ON IDOMA ORTHOGRAPHY

Since the missionary contact with the Idoma in 1924, all the efforts in learning and reducing the Idoma language into writing have been based on mastering the western tonal pronunciation of the sounds the missionaries heard in Idoma. These they phonetically wrote down for their convenience at the expense of Idoma tones, sounds and phonetics, in which the missionaries could not orthographically differentiate between 'o' and 'ɔ' which are unique to the Idoma language in terms of accurate meanings of Idoma words.

This problem continued until 1985, when in a seminar/workshop on the Systematic Way of Writing Idoma, organised by the Idoma Bible translation project in consultation with the Benue State Government, the Universities of Jos, Zaria, Ibadan, Nsukka, advanced teachers College Katsina-Ala and Benue State Polytechnic that a standard authentic Idoma orthography was established and agreed upon.

Idoma since then has been written in a systematic and standardised way with 'ɔ' as against 'o' and with tones in which the low tone is indicated by the absence of a tone mark, the high tone marked with a vertical stroke, and the mid tone with a horizontal stroke in all institutions of learning in Idoma, Benue State and the country as a whole. This thesis will therefore, follow the agreed standardised way of writing Idoma with 'ɔ' and tonal marks, except when an existing text is being cited in our discussion.

GLOSSARY

The Following frequently used Idoma words in this thesis have been listed for the benefit of those not familiar with the Idoma language.

Aa	you plural	Akpɔɔ	an unidentified tribe associated with the Idoma people
Adā	Father	Akp'la	thunder
Ada	first daughter	Alace	ruin
Ada	hut	Alalekwū	ancestral spirit
Adā	a big pot	Alekwa'fiya	ancestral masquerades
Adaalekwu	father of the ancestors	Alece	human beings
Abɔ	hand	Alemu	an orange
Abɔ	there	Alɔ	us
Acadu	the royal undertaker, the king maker	Amuome	last
Acce	people	Anɔle	palm oil
Acce	agreement, curse	Anyā	women, name of a girl
Aful'eyi	first	Anyā	anger
Agabā	lion	Anyā	you save
Agbā	chain, prison	Anyā	gambling
Agba	chin	Anyakwuɔce	elders
Agodō	bed	Apa	Idoma ancestral home land
Agwu	leprosy	Apa	lizard
Ahɔ	ear	Ape	pawpaw
Ai	children	Ee'kpɔ	water
Aidɔ	sorrow, sighing	Egbe	gun
Aje	earth, name of a girl	Eje	wine
Aje	high building	Eje	beans
Akpa	bridge	Ejealekwū	ancestral wine feast
Ākpa	insect	Eko	time
Ākpa	a tribe, language	Eyē	millet
Akpā	old rag	Eyi	eyes
eba	soothsaying	ewa	knife
ebē	animal, meat	ewa	crowd
ebɔ	peace, name of a bitter plant	ewa	partidge
ece	world, name of a boy	eya	sacrifice
ecɔ	stone	Obiɔbi	evil

Efúnya	horse war	Ocikāpā	rice
ega	place	Odo	soul, yellow
egba	root, decent, shout	Ogége	potatoes
ēgbā	dues	Ogwóeba	soothsayer, fortune teller
egbā	needs	Ohēnyeta	saviour
égǎ	age group	Okónu	mouth
egǎ	grinding mile	Okpani	master
ehā	poverty	Okwū	dead body
eha	ants	Okwute	staff of office, source being
ehǎ	farm, five	Ólihi	market
eka	oath taking, covenant	Ólihiabakpa	hausamarket
ekā	monkey, carrying pad	Óndu	lord
ekpa	bag, pocket	Ónduāje	land owner
emie	hunger	Opo	horn
é'ímé	kolanut	Oyǎeyi	life
éne	mother	ǎbā	husband
éne	yesterday	ǎbā	food storage
ene	a tree	ǎbā	war trench
ēne	and	ǎbi	evil, ugly, bad
ene	four	ǎbiipu	wickedness
enǎ	sun	ǎce	king, chief
enǎci	east	ǎcē	person
enǎne	west	ǎcēolihi	market administrator
enū	hoe	ǎdu	wealth, bronze, name of a boy
enu	weight	ǎfu	power
enwū	nose	ǎfiye	slave
enwū	honey	ǎgwa	raining season
ēnyā	this	ǎhā	blessing
enya	blemish	ǎha	poison
eta	three	ǎhe	a witch
éta	a girl's name	ǎkǎbǎ	money, coin
etē	pot	ǎkpa	book, stream, river
ewa	crowd, squirrel's tail	ǎkpa	rod, staff, walking stick, spear
ǎkwu	root, bottom	Icica	traditional sacred music
ǎkwūeyi	truth	Ihayi	year
ǎla	fire, name of a boy	Ihi	yam
ǎlé	home	Ije	song
ǎléekwū	home of the dead	Ije	money

᠑mā	salt	Ik᠑᠑	everlasting fire, hell, damnation, pain, hell
᠑ḡmá	a girl's name	Ikpōēlaōkwuōoka	inquest
᠑nā	pounded yam, food	Ikpō᠑w᠑	shrine of a personal god
᠑na	dream	Ikpōkwu	masquerade
᠑na	exhibition	Ikwū	death, cry
᠑n᠑	pain	ḡkwu	crocodile, name of a man
᠑nyā	wife	Ikwūbiyaelā	death spoils matters
᠑nya	horse, back	In᠑᠑kpa	school
᠑nye	who	Inu	house
᠑nye	sweetness	Inyila᠑lē	propriation sacrifice
᠑ny᠑nḡkp᠑	secrete society	Ipi	open wound
᠑ḡwe	display or exhibition	ḡpi	smell
᠑pā	traditional burial cloth	Ipu	stomach, inside
᠑pu	the open arena, play ground, or the council ground	Ipu᠑ma	house holds
᠑tē	hunting	Ipu᠑nu	family units
᠑we	road, entrance, way	Ipuinu	primary family units
᠑w᠑	lord, personal god, a tree	ḡsu	sea, a girl's name
᠑w᠑ico	The Supreme God	Ita	proverb. Pity sayings
᠑w᠑ōopā	sacrifice to a personal god	Itekwu	great depth
᠑ya	friend	Iyē	name
᠑yā	moon	Iyēōōgwu	purification sacrifice
᠑yi	child	Ojila	the council of the people
᠑yi	an arrow	Opo	horn
ḡce	today	Uba	drum
Ice	traditional game	Uculo	ritual
Icō	up	Ugwū	chicken
Ic᠑᠑ci	church	Ugwū	sacred tree
Ic᠑᠑gbā	attribute, title	Ugwu	honour
Igāb᠑	title holder	Ukpē	share
Igbānkpa	maize	Ukpō	music played only for kings
		ḡkwūlūkwū	sacred burial place for chiefs
		Utā	finis
		ḡmō	to kill

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. 1. The Choice of the Research Topic

This thesis will explore in detail a new area of mission scholarship on the reception, effect and development of Christianity among the Idoma people. Idoma is one of the ethnic groups in Benue State Nigeria with a population of over one million, living in a strip of land about two hundred kilometres wide stretching from the bank of River Benue south for about three hundred kilometres. To the east live the Tiv, with the Igala to the West and the Igbo to the south. The Idoma people speak a common Idoma language with slight variations in dialect. About 60% of Idoma people are Christians, less than 0.5% Muslims and the rest adherents of Idoma primal religion.

The Idoma, have been neglected in previous studies. For instance, the second half of the 19th century marks a period of a major inflow of missionaries to the West Coast of Africa with the aim of christianising West Africa. The story looks like a successful mission in terms of numbers of churches, schools, health institutions, theological colleges that were planted in West Africa, and the large number of people that responded to Christianity. The West African story tellers in narrating their story, especially about Nigeria, seem to focus predominantly on the Yorubas, Ibos, Hausas and other tribes of the southern part of the country almost totally without reference to the other tribes and especially the middle belt area, which ironically are predominately Christians. The Idoma belong to these neglected areas in the eyes of the writers of Christian history in Nigeria. Even though few a books have been written on Idoma by

by Dr Erim¹ who focused primarily on the various phases of the Idoma migration to its present location, and argued that the Idoma people seems not to have a common identity before British colonial rule, Abraham² who looked at the Idoma language from the Yoruba language perspective, and Armstrong³ on the history and culture of Idoma people, there is no evidence of any explicit reference to Christianity that made contact with the Idoma as from 1924 in any of these studies. Therefore, this research would be a study that would remedy an important area of neglect in Idoma, and contribute to our comprehensive understanding of the Idoma people, Idoma Christianity and the history of Christianity in West Africa.

Secondly, where we have any story at all on the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity, such stories are written mostly by the missionaries with their own goals. Among many of such goals is perhaps, to tell such stories for their own audience on how God assisted them to “bring light” to the benighted souls in a far away Idoma. Such stories are bound to be propagandist, primarily designed to boost moral and material aid in their missionary work. In most cases, such stories praise the triumph of Christianity over “paganism”. A close examination of such stories reveal that they lack overall perspective. They have been deficient because the perspective stems from an understanding of Idoma and what happens in Idoma from the world view of the missionaries, who are always telling “their story” and not “my story”. Such stories as Bartels rightly observes,

¹ See, E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality 1600-1900: Problems in Studying the Origins and Developments of Ethnicity*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1981.

² Captain, R. C. Abraham, *The Idoma Language Wordlist Idoma Chrestomathy Idoma Proverbs*, London, University of London Press, 1951.

³ R. G. Armstrong, “The Idoma-Speaking Peoples”, in *Peoples of the Niger Benue Confluence*, Daryll Forde (ed.), London, International African Institute, 1955.

...are in general the work of European men and women who looked at the African scene with the foreign eyes. What these people saw and wrote had their own activities and attitude at the centre, and the result did not always reflect the thoughts and feelings of the Africans among whom they worked.⁴

Such history becomes Euro-centric instead of Idoma-centric, and therefore, sees history as “presented to them”, and not “my story”. Idoma becomes “their story or the story of Idoma” in which they give an account of what they think we are as Idoma, and not what we truly are. Idoma becomes chained up to the missionary diaries and books at the expense of other sources that make up Idoma, such as arts, songs, poetry etc. As result, Idoma always becomes a negative subject of her history in which she is not the object. This makes it the story of a winner and not a loser. There is a very strong need to look at the story of the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity from a new indigenous Idoma perspective. This need was earlier stressed by The Rev. Ivan Chetwynd who only deals with the story of the Methodist Church in Idoma from a Methodist missionary perspective in his book *Seed Time: The Story of the Methodist Church in Idoma 1924-1974*. When among some of his conclusions he said,

I am well aware of the limitations of this book
Above all, it is an “official” history, telling the story
from the point of view of missionaries and ministers.
The real story of Methodism in Idoma is written in the
changed hearts and lives of thousands of Idoma men
and women. I hope that one day, some of them will tell
their own story.⁵

Chetwynd’s observations firmly underline the need for a new indigenous perspective in the story of the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. This thesis will become the fulfilment of that hopeful day in which we will tell our authentic Idoma

⁴ Francis Lodowice Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1965, p. xi

⁵ I.G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time: The Story of the Methodist Church in Idoma 1924-1974*, Makurdi, Spiritan Press, 1973, p. iii

story of our interaction with the Methodist missionaries, and clearly set out what really happened in Idoma in her reception and development of Christianity.

Thirdly, being born and brought up in a country in which some one had always told your story for you, one is bound to ask, 'What really is my own side of the story of the interaction between me and Christianity? What is my own history before I ever made contact with Christianity? Does my present understanding of Christianity truly represent Idoma culture? Is the articulation of my faith Idoma or alien?' As my mind battled for answers to questions such as these, my problem became more compounded as a product of a modern missionary movement in which conversion to the Christian faith, had involved among other things, acceptance of alien religious tradition, denouncing of one's own cultural heritage and embracing the Western culture.

To the Methodist missionaries who came to Idoma, Christianity was inseparable from their own western cultural inheritance, and many of the Idoma people who came to embrace or encounter Christianity have acquired many western traits that have nothing to do with Christianity. The Idoma interaction with Christianity lost the cultural cohesion which Idoma needed to adapt Idoma Christianity. The Idoma people were treated as having no religion, tradition, language, institutions, racial character, and empty vessels to be filled with European goods. They consequently felt deculturized and denationalised as Idoma Christians began to look, behave and dress like the Western missionaries. The Idoma Christians today have become fully aware of the cultural and religious discontinuity they had to suffer on the account of their Christian faith, and have also implied an uprootedness from their culture. How can the Idoma affirm their Christian faith in their own land without breaking their religious

and cultural ties? For the Idoma people to do this would imply their renunciation of the western cultural ties that were introduced into Christianity in Idoma by the Methodist missionaries with their own indigenous primal religious and cultural roots. There is therefore, a great need for Christianity to take root in Idoma and interact with the Idoma in such ways as they can call and feel to be their own.

Fourthly, I was brought up in a mission school where to speak my own language attracted a fine of two kobo.⁶ But why? Doesn't God understand Idoma? My problems became more compounded when I became the Idoma Bible translator. My nine years of investigation into my own Idoma culture as a Bible translator raised many questions in my mind about the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity. How can I translate the Bible - God's word into my own clear, natural meaningful Idoma, when I was forbidden the use of that language in my early education? Am I to translate English Bible or Idoma Bible? In order to do this, I became involved in Semitic research at Queens University of Belfast and tried very hard to examine the Semitic background, which is the cradle of Christianity and to relate this to Idoma. Such an exercise brought me to a great realisation that the Idoma people, have perhaps, entirely misunderstood or lost the basic understanding of Christianity, whereas the Idoma culture provides a perfect cultural setting for a better understanding of Christianity.

The need for historical and cultural understanding of the reception and development of Christianity in Idoma is illustrated in the existing Idoma New Testament which I regard orthographically, syntactically and literally in cultural terms as alien, and

points to the problems of finding ways to indigenise and contextualise Christianity in Idoma, West Africa and Africa as a whole. All these realisations and findings provide an urgent stimulus to a thesis of this kind, because I cannot sufficiently progress as a professional Idoma Bible translator unless these cultural issues are sorted out.

1. 2. Importance and Purpose

(a) What I am proposing here is a study without precedent as the only major study of Idoma is Dr Erim's outside investigation into the development and the origin of Idoma as from the middle of the sixteenth century. I will go beyond this to Idoma pre-colonial and pre-missionary history and to contextual questions in relation to the Idoma interaction with Christianity which, had arisen from 1924 when the missionaries arrived in Idoma

(b) The study is essentially that of emphasising the Idoma point of view in the interaction between Idoma and Christianity. It is hoped that such emphasis will provide a new perspective in the study of the reception and development of Christianity among a given people. It is also hoped that this study will, if not serving as a pioneer study of Christianity in Idoma, add another dimension in which the subjective feelings of the Idoma will appear. It is always important to view the reception, development and effect of Christianity on a given people from the inside outwards. In this process, we hope to see something of our own response to Christianity. By this we mean, approaching our discussion from the perspective of our

⁶ The value of two kobo at the time of writing is less than .00% of one pence of British money. But its value at the time of the imposition of the fine was two pence. This was a lot of money then, when a whole month's wage was about six pence.

Idoma self-understanding, and how we respond to the gospel as Idoma. This study therefore, aims at uncovering the Idoma cultural response to Christianity

(c) The significance of this study is also that it will enable the Idoma and non Idoma to better understand the heritage from which the Idoma has grown and thereby become aware of the kind of response the new Christian situation in Idoma demands; both the roles of churches and missionaries in the new situation, as they seek a new avenue of service to God in Idoma

(d) The importance of this study will be seen again as it highlights the cumulative capital Christianity has derived from the cultural language of a given people. This study, will also highlight the need of adaptation of a culture of a given people as a vessel of rendering God's message in the context of everyday life of that given people, and how such an exercise could enable effective indigenous reception and development of Christianity and real religious change among those people.

(e) The significance of this thesis, does not lie only in the interaction that exists between the Idoma and Christianity, but also with those Idoma who are very interested in their past, and are fully aware of the complexity of their history, and who have been crying for an Idoma historian for years. This study, therefore, will be a welcome relief in Idoma, that at last an Idoma attempt is being made to document their past, using their interaction with Christianity as a case study. This will contribute to our understanding of Idoma history, ethnicity, culture and origin.

(f) It is hoped that this study will reopen the whole subject of Christianity and culture with an indication of the fresh lines of inquiry now open to us. The particularity of

this study has hinged on the particularity of Idoma culture and religious beliefs as essential components of the reception, effect and development of Christianity in Idoma. It is finally hoped that this study will be a methodological contribution toward imparting greater coherence to the disparate sources of the Christian-culture interactions, and Christian missionary activities in West Africa and Africa as a whole.

1. 3. Methods

Christianity as Isichei rightly observes, “is always related to the cultural presuppositions and practices of the culture where it is located”.⁷ If Christianity is to find an expression in Idoma, it can only do so in and through the Idoma cultural practices and traditions. The approach to this study therefore will be contextual. By, this we mean “the continual process by which God’s truth and justice are applied to and emerge in concrete historical situations”⁸ in Idoma. That is taking into account all aspects of Idoma content and the local Idoma situations seriously in our discussions.

This contextual approach will not be content with the foreign abstract, intellectual, and systematic presentation of Christianity in Idoma, but rather hopes and aims to primarily see Christianity in a truly, genuine Idoma concrete situation. Christianity in Idoma should not be concluded from the outside as a western impact on Idoma, but from the inside by the people of God in Idoma. The Idoma can be said to “have heard and received the message only as the Christian Church [in Idoma] has incarnated itself in the life and world of those who have embraced it”.⁹ This contextual approach will be addressed from the Idoma perspective and the process of, interaction between

⁷ E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, London, SPCK, 1995, p. 5.

⁸ N. Thomas, *Readings in World Mission*, London SPCK, 1995, p. 170.

Idoma and Christianity will be closely examined and critically evaluated. We will argue for Christianity to be part of the local Idoma culture, rather than adopting a foreign culture to put Christianity in Idoma. Christianity, if it is to take hold in Idoma must be embodied in the Idoma receptor culture.

We will also focus on the Idoma as a people with their own history, religion, and social structures before they came in contact with Christianity. We will critically examine the variety of ways in which Idoma reacted to this external agent of change. To do this will require an investigation into the total context of Idoma life, their history, religion, language, epistemology, culture and way of life. This was done, during my ethnographic and archival field work in Idoma.

Emphasis will be given to the importance of the Idoma people, not merely as objects of evangelism, but as subjects in a process of dynamic religious change, who initiated in some cases the policies that missionaries followed. In other words, in what ways have the Idoma people and their culture affected the ways the Christian message is put or spread in Idoma? The Idoma perspective of this study will also place much emphasis on the Idoma cultural process through which the Idoma came to terms with Christianity, accepted it as an essential factor of Idoma life and tried to reshape Christianity to suit the Idoma needs, customs and traditions and spread it among themselves and beyond.

⁹ Ibid., p. 169

My underlying assumption will be the importance of the pre-knowledge of Idoma and my historical, social, economic and religious knowledge of Idoma. This will depend on my history, pre-Christian and Christian experience. Our experience data and Idoma content will be taken into serious consideration. I will make an attempt to move from context to the text, rather than the western approach of the text to the context. The context here is Idoma. Our Idoma experiential context will throw meaning on the reception and development of Christianity in Idoma.

Secondly, my experience of my own Idoma language and the opportunity of a thorough investigation and analysis of that language and translating the Bible into that language is an added advantage for me. The experiences of the Idoma grassroots, who may not have enough English to explain their views or responses and re-actions to some of the Methodist missionary activities and Christianity in Idoma were primarily investigated without the barrier of an interpreter.

1. 4. Sources

The Idoma themselves become one of the primary sources of this research. In this category, the Idoma oral traditions, myths, legends, arts, music, sacred places, rites and ceremonies, dances, pithy sayings and religious system were thoroughly investigated, and critically examined. The collection of these materials necessitated my meeting the Idoma people at the local scene on three occasions, first, between February 1981 to January 1982 as Idoma Bible translator, second, July to September of 1996 and third, July to September of 1997 for interactions and some direct and informal interviews during my ethnographic field works in Idoma. The interviews

were conducted with individuals of various categories and the information collected was classified, analysed, quantified and interpreted. The questions that were used in this fieldwork were open-ended questions. These, I believe gave the informants the opportunity to answer the questions in their own words. This enabled me to record a verbatim response to my probe using various recording techniques such as tape recording or note taking. This ethnographic field work in some occasions involved my participation overtly or covertly in Idoma daily lives. Over a period of time, festivals, funeral rites and marriage ceremonies and other religious rites of Idoma, were observed, and I recorded what was being said and done. And asking and collecting whatever data that were available to throw light on the issues that were the focus of this study.

Apart from being Idoma, and part of the Idoma system with my experiences as the Idoma Bible translator, which was an added advantage for data collection, I also visited other neighbouring tribes related to the Idoma such as Idomanokwu in Plateau State of Nigeria, Yala tribe in Gongola State and the Jukwuns in Adamawa State, collecting, collating and comparing data.

There were other primary sources that were consulted in this research. These included the archival materials of The Nigerian National Archives in Enugu, Kaduna and Ibadan. Otukpo Central archives in Otukpo, The Archives of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue. The Methodist National Archives in Lagos. The Archives of the Methodist Church Overseas Division (MCOD), the Norcross Diary, at MCO in London, and the personal Diaries of ex- Methodist missionaries in Idoma: Rev. T.A Johnston, Rev. and Mrs. Wyle, Rev. & Mrs. T. K Johnston, Rev. Dr & Mrs. Igwe.

The Archives of the Centre of the Study of Christianity in the non-western World (CSCNWW) and that of the School of Oriental and African Studies, (SOAS) University of London and finally the Idoma New Testament were consulted.

Other sources of information are secondary, but essential. These are the works already published by various scholars in this discipline or in the area of my research. These include books, monographs, articles; papers presented in seminars, conferences and personal interviews with some key missionaries that have worked in Idoma.

Although, the boundary of my research is set within Benue, Adamawa, Kogi and Plateau States of Nigeria, this does not preclude contributive examples drawn from the various States of Nigeria, and Africa as a whole. I would, however like to clearly state here that, whereas Idoma is part of Africa as a whole, and whereas contributive examples may be drawn from the various regions of Africa, the concentration of this study will be on Idoma. Even within this specific limitation, it is not possible to write about all that happened in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity. As a result we will be purposefully selective in our discussions and focus on such issues that best illustrate the concern of this thesis.

1. 5. Aims and Content

Having introduced, stated the reasons for the choice of this study and the aims, purposes, and the methodology of this research, this introductory chapter also sets out the principal thesis underlying this research, that the process of Idoma reception and development of Christianity, initiated by European Methodist missionaries in 1924, requires more effective contextualization in Idoma culture which will be achieved by

a culturally attuned re-translation of the Bible on the principle of dynamic cultural equivalence so as to “invest Christianity with indigenous solidity”¹⁰ in Idoma. And methodologically, calling attention to the role of Idoma as subjects of religious change: not merely as objects of evangelisation by overseas missionaries.

CHAPTER TWO of this thesis will consider Idoma history and ethnicity. This chapter will briefly address the problem of the origin and development of ethnicity. Who are the Idoma? The thesis of Dr Erim and Professor Armstrong on the origin and development of Idoma will be critically examined and evaluated, by investigating the *Alekwu* cultic practices from which Erim and Armstrong were debarred. We will throw new light upon the Idoma pre-colonial and pre-missionary history. After having established the Idoma ethnicity the chapter will then consider cultural characteristics common to all Idoma namely: Birth, Marriage, Death, Burial and Rituals.

This will help us identify Idoma theology in **CHAPTER THREE** which will be defined and explained, and compared to other forms of African primal theology.

CHAPTER FOUR will focus on the early missionary activities among the Idoma. A brief sketch of the overall history of how the Idoma made contact with Christianity will be presented. But since this is not the main thrust of this thesis, the emphasis will be moved to some of the activities of the Methodist Church in Idoma, which is one of the particularities of this thesis. This chapter will look at the arrival of missionaries in

¹⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1993, p. 70.

general and in specific the arrival of the Methodist missionaries. We will also find out here, the principal personalities involved. In other words, who did what in Idoma? We will then focus on settlement and problems in two specific areas: culture and language. What were the cultural interactions between the missionaries and Idoma? How did the missionaries handle Idoma culture or how did the Idoma culture handle the missionaries? We will focus on one case study in which one of the missionaries took to the Idoma culture of polygamous marriage and eventually married three Idoma ladies, and the consequences of his action for the Idoma, the missionaries, and the Methodist Missionary Society in London as well as its effects on the Idoma-Christian interaction. Attention will also be focused on the language problem. We will then focus on the missionary image and perceptions of Idoma past values, culture, religious beliefs and practices and language. We will highlight the effects such perceptions had on the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

This chapter will also examine the Idoma reaction to the Methodist missionaries and their activities. The time limit here will be the period between 1924-1962. What happened between the Idoma and the missionaries in the first thirty-eight years? The relationship between the Idoma and the missionaries during these periods were in most cases strained, and deceptive. Idoma appears to the Methodist missionaries as

a vast sponge, at one moment ready to soak up missionaries and Christian religious ideas and another squeezing them out in sudden confrontation without much visible change: despite the superficial impression of receptiveness, missionaries appear to have encountered [in Idoma] a subtle, but stubborn resistance....¹¹

¹¹ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity The Religious Impact*, London, C. Hurst and Company, 1983, p. 31-32.

In illustration of Sanneh's observation, attention will be given to the factors of resistance as Idoma sought to retain those aspects of their culture which they regarded as fundamental and as result rejected the Christian message that threatened it

CHAPTER FIVE begins one of the central arguments of this thesis focusing on the spread of Christianity in Idoma and the use of education as an agency for evangelism and church growth. In this, apart from focusing on a descriptive account of what happened, there will be a critical evaluation of the methods and the messages that were passed on, and all the problems that surrounded such an exercise.

In examining the educational activities, we would critically probe the aims and the objectives of the missionary education at various stages in Idoma. What type of educated Idoma were they trying to produce when they began to teach Idoma children Mathematics, Biology, European history, English and French? What were the missionary aims in banning and imposing a fine on the use of Idoma language in classes on Idoma children in favour of English language? Perhaps these questions and related ones had earlier troubled Westermann, when he rightly said,

It is absurd to teach a child to read a foreign language instead of his own, and to make him believe that his own is not fit for reading and writing, so that from the beginning the child learns to despise that which should be dearest to him-the sounds his mother taught him.¹²

By and large, the effect of the injection of such teaching on a large scale into Idoma is obviously to break up much of the Idoma traditional way of life, culture, and language that is unique to every culture, and as much as possible, replace it with that

¹² Diedrich Westermann, "The Place and Function of the Vernacular in African Education", *International Review of Missions*, 1925, p. 32.

of the West. How are the Idoma to be educated as Idoma without removing them from their people, culture and environment? There could be no better answer to this question than that of a renowned missionary to Africa Alexander Fraser when writing about the aims of African education, he rightly argued that,

...subjects must be taught in relation to the life around. Science will begin with the observation of ants, seeing mosquitoes breed, getting to know the flowers and plants. It will go on to destroying mosquitoes, preventing the inroads of ants, improving flowers and trees, and studying soils....¹³

But these were hardly the case in Idoma.

CHAPTER SIX represents the heart of this thesis focusing on contextual factors in the reception and development of Christianity in Idoma. The analysis will concentrate mainly on Bible translation, in which a very special emphasis will be given to the Idoma Bible translation. But why? Sanneh's explanation in this regard is worth noting as to why this special emphasis would be placed on the Idoma Bible. He rightly, argues that without the native Scriptures the local populations construed the churches as an instrument of foreign domination, and became as a result alienated from the Romanized Christians. He said,

"Translation thus came to invest Christianity with indigenous solidity. The vernacular became a necessity for the life of religion, the soil that nurtured the plant until its eminence acquired doctrinal heights."¹⁴

This section is unique in many ways. Apart from the fact that the writer is an Idoma Bible translator, historians have paid very little attention to the cumulative capital Christianity has derived from the common language of the ordinary people. To many secular historians, languages are only of political importance, while the economic and

¹³ Fraser A. G, " Aims of African Education" *International Review of Missions*, 1925, p. 517.

¹⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1993, p. 70.

social historians see language as a vehicle that creates social probability and perhaps social tension, but to the Christians, the adaptation of a vernacular as a vessel of rendering God's message enables effective, personal and community religious change. This is why we set out here to focus on Idoma language in its cultural dimensions. After all, Christianity, before making any contact with Idoma, had traditionally, right from its inception or origin translated out of Aramaic, Hebrew language and from that position came to exert its influence on a Gentile culture which she adopted to extend her life in the Greek culture and language.¹⁵

Secondly, I am of the opinion that the genuine later reception and development of Christianity in Idoma and the reaction of the Idoma to Christianity and some of the missionary activities were on the basis of the Idoma language and the impact the Idoma Bible translation made on Idoma. No matter how any one tries to translate the Christian message into Idoma, the final articulation of such a message has to come from the Idoma. No matter how much of Hebrew and Greek we know, the final name of God in Idoma has to come from the Idoma people. This demonstrates the supreme importance of this section on the Idoma Bible translation. Idoma in our view is best seen and understood in terms of Idoma language. Translation and culture are intrinsically inter-twined. If you are into the language, you are into the unique culture of Idoma, and where language dies, the culture dies as well. In giving up our language we give up ourselves as a national unit. Hence this area will be covered in detail.

¹⁵ For a classic discussion on a similar view, see Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering The West: Christianity And The Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1993, Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter six will also focus on the history of the Idoma Bible translation. This again will not just be a descriptive account of what happened, but a critical evaluation of how the New Testament was translated. We will highlight here, the problem of the unreadability, and clear natural meaning in Idoma. Why can the Idoma New Testament not be fluently and meaningfully read? Was the New Testament a literal translation of the Bible into Idoma or a true natural, clear, meaningful Idoma translation that took into consideration the Idoma cultural dimension? Was it a failure of execution? Why do the Idoma have so many problems in reading and comprehending the New Testament? It is argued that the problem of inculturating Christianity into Idoma has not been sufficiently looked at either scientifically, ethnographically, linguistically, historically or culturally in the Idoma New Testament translation. The existing Idoma New Testament, even though, it is close to the Idoma culture, it is sufficiently different, and as such, it is not in use. It is rather more of an Igbo New Testament than an Idoma New Testament.

In discussing the history of the Idoma Old Testament translation, we will briefly, discuss the problem of the interaction between the source language and the receptor language. How do we translate some Semitic concepts into Idoma? Or how do we handle in Idoma some Semitic cultural heritage? These and related issues raised the current controversial argument on the meaning of texts. These types of problems and others will be evaluated in this chapter.

This brings us to **CHAPTER SEVEN** in which we will consider Idoma Christianity today. This chapter will examine the cultural process through which the Idoma came

to terms with Christianity and accepted it as an essential factor of Idoma life and culture, and tried to reshape Christianity to suit the Idoma needs, custom and traditions. We will be asking in this chapter as well, what has Christianity done to Idoma? Has Idoma been robbed of its life, culture and traditions by Christianity or has Idoma been able to persuade Christianity to translate itself into the Idoma culture and life as it did in the Aramaic, and Hellenistic cultures, philosophies and world view?

We will also be focusing in this chapter, on how Idoma discovers her selfhood and develops and articulates Christianity and theology in her own Idoma concrete historical and cultural situation. We hope as well in this chapter, to attempt to liberate Christian theology from its paralysing captivity to western norms and relate it to the Idoma cultural norms. The Idoma have been converted to the western, Latin and Greek cultures in embracing Christianity, and now the Idoma are asking: How do we see and embrace or interact with Christianity from the Idoma perspective and point of view? This chapter will hopefully attempt to suggest the Idoma articulation of liturgy with specific reference to church music in which Christianity must be allowed to take root in the soil of Idoma culture in which they are planted, and how it may grow in structure as an institution of our own and not something alien. We will conclude with a specific reference to the effect of the Idoma Bible translation on the Idoma.

The **EIGHTH AND FINAL CHAPTER** will draw out from the study, those conclusions that are sustained by the thesis. We might go on to assess, the degree to which it can be claimed that Idoma Christianity is a distinctive cultural expression of Christianity in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria and the contribution this can make to mission scholarship, the reception, and development of Christianity in West Africa and African Christianity as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO

IDOMA PEOPLE: IDENTITY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the Idoma people and highlight specifically the areas of conflict in the Idoma interaction with Christianity. The discussion in this chapter would also help to highlight how to understand a non-literate society whose identity is based in the memory, the language and the social culture of the people. The question of where one comes from cannot be satisfactorily answered from sociological and anthropological investigations, but rather through active participation in the life and culture of one's own people. From such position we would hope to penetrate the Idoma people. Even though the Idoma are very secretive people, and sometimes very difficult to understand, we would hopefully go beyond this barrier of secrecy as an insider and infiltrate the Idoma through their identity in forms of origin, language, social structures and organisations and specifically focus on three rites of passage; birth, marriage, and burial, and how these contribute to the Idoma identity and their implications for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

2.1 Idoma Origin

Idoma is one of the ethnic groups in Benue State Nigeria. The name Idoma originally applied to the Ocobo in Ohimini Local Government Area, Agadagba and Ugboju¹ districts of Idoma, but now the name Idoma has been accepted more widely and

¹ See the Map of the Idoma Districts on page ix for the areas of Ocobo in Oglewu, and Agadabga in Ugboju districts

become the name by which all the Idoma ethnic groups designate themselves, and are today addressed as such by their neighbours²

For the purpose of our study, suffice to say at the moment that, Idoma people today number over one million people. They live in a strip of land or occupy a belt of territory that stretches from the southern bank of the River Benue south for about three hundred kilometres to the northern fringes of Igbo land. The Idoma territory lies between latitudes 60 North longitudes 80 east and covers an area of approximately six thousand square kilometres³

The Idoma are bounded by the Tiv, and Iggede⁴ to the east, the Igala people to the west, and the Nsukka, Ezza and Igbo to the south, and the Benue river to the north.

This geographical outline of Idoma had been defined since the mid-nineteenth century. However, in spite of some administrative changes introduced during the colonial and postcolonial periods, Idoma ethnic label and territory remained virtually unchanged. Idoma today consists of twenty two administrative districts spread over seven local government areas of Benue State, namely: Ado, Agatu, Apa, Ohimini, Ogbadigbo, Okpokwu and Otukpo Local Governments⁵. Otukpo is the headquarters of

² Idoma neighbours are the Tivs in Benue State, Igalas in Kogi State, Doma in Nassarawa State, Yala in Cross River State, Angers in Plateau State, Jukuns in Taraba State, and Nkum in Ogoja.

³ see Otukpo Local Government report 1976:6

⁴ Although, Iggede people do not see themselves as Idoma today, from the evidences of oral traditions, it could be successfully suggested that Iggede are Idoma. Especially from the traditions of the succession to the throne of the ɔcɛ Idoma, which Iggede held for over 45 years until 1996, when The ɔcɛ Idoma travelled (died) showing that the Igedes are Idoma. According to the Idoma traditional law of the succession to the throne of the ɔcɛ Idoma, a non Idoma or a slave will never be allowed to the throne of The Agabaidu of Idoma. On this ground alone, one could argue that, even though references are made to them as Idoma neighbours, we are of the view that the Igedes are Idoma. It is hoped that a later study will investigate this.

⁵ See the Benue State map on page vii for locations of these Local Governments

the Idoma traditional council⁶ and the home of the paramount Chief of Idoma- The
ƆƆ Idoma

Idoma people speak a common Idoma language with four variant tonal dialects as spoken in the north by the Agatu in Agatu local Government Area, in central Idoma spoken by the Ocobo, Oglewu in Ohimini Local Government Area, Otukpo, Adoka, Ugboju in Otukpo Local Government Area, and parts of Okpokwu Local Government Area, in the west by Okpokwu and Ogbadibo Local governments; and finally in the south spoken by the Agilas, Ulayi and Igwumales in Ado local Government.

Other ethnic groups also live in Idoma, and speak a different language from the Idoma language. These are Ezza and Izzi peoples who are sub-groups of Nsukka and Abakiliki Igbo in Enugu State. Uffia and Effium who are sub-groups of the Orring language from Cross-River State. Both the Uffia that is spoken by the Utokons, and Effium spoken in Agila, are to be found today in Ado Local Government. There are also the Igedes⁷ in Otukpo and Oju local governments and Akpa in Otukpo Local Government Area.

As Erim rightly stated,

until modern times, the Idoma were one of the least known peoples of this region. They were remote from the point of view of European contact in the early years of British Colonial administration in Nigeria. The greater part of Idoma land remained largely unknown until the second decade of this century⁸

⁶ Otukpo until 1976, had also been the political, religious and administrative headquarters of Idoma.

⁷ The Igedes recently have refused to be called or known as Idoma, but then, Who are the Igedes? This is what future study will hopefully investigate.

⁸ E. O Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, 1981, p.3.

This is why it is very important here to place the Idoma people in a proper historical context which is essential for a better understanding of the Idoma, and for a better appreciation for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

Idoma is also the name of the language spoken by the Idoma people and the name of their land as well. The word Idoma therefore has three connotations: the people, their language and land. According to some sources⁹ the use of the term Idoma as a generic appellation for all the people speaking a language that goes by the same name is a fairly recent phenomenon. For example, Erim¹⁰ sees the word Idoma as “anglicanised” form of Idu’ma [i.e., born of Idu], and argues that Idu is the putative father of the original Idoma peoples. Erim constructed the following genealogy to buttress this claim:

It was Idu who begot all the Idoma.
He also begot the following children:
Ananawoogeno who begot the people of Igwumale;
Olinaogwu who begot the people of Ugboju;
Idum who begot the people of Adoka
Agabi who begot the people of Oglewu;
Ebeibi who begot the people of Umogidi in Adoka, and
Ode who begot the people of Yala....¹¹

Despite the elaborate genealogy that Erim who is an outside investigator, constructed, the Idoma for several reasons have not accepted the putative father theory of all Idoma groups. Firstly, as Erim, rightly, noted himself, there is the erroneous belief by early colonial anthropologists who collected genealogies from which these claims are derived, that linguistic and cultural unity amongst groups like Idoma, implied

⁹ See for example, Justice A.P. Anyebe, “The Idoma Secrets”, 1975, Unpublished Paper; Ikwue, J. O. “Otukpo Genealogy”, 1974, Unpublished Paper.

¹⁰ E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9

common ancestry¹². Secondly, it is important to note here that of all the twenty-two Idoma districts, only, Ugboju, Adoka and Otukpo claim descent from Idu.¹³ If the claims of these three districts are true, at what point in history did they separate to become three distinct entities? I believe this was long before their migrations from the Idoma ancestral homeland in Apa¹⁴

Thirdly, there is no oral evidence in the other nineteen districts of Idoma that supports Erim's theory of Idu as the putative father of the Idoma.¹⁵

If the word Idoma did not derive from *Idu'ma* - born of Idu, then, where does its origin lie? Major K. Officer a colonial administrator of the ancient Doma in the

¹² Ibid.,

¹³ See Otukpo Local Government, *Archives*, OT/LG, Geneology/1.

¹⁴ All Idoma claim Apa as their ancestral homeland. Apa has been identified as a region of the ancient Kwararafa Confederacy, which, prior to the fifteenth century was under the hegemony of the Abakpawariga. The modern location of this region has not been successfully ascertained. While Meek for example in the 1930s suggested that Apa is between longitude 10 and 12, latitude 8 and 9, Justice A.P. Anyebe argues that Apa was located somewhere along Gindindorowa [Gindinwaya]-Wukari road in modern Taraba State. Armstrong (1955:147ff) earlier suggested that the Ife tribe commonly called the Apa-tribe is of unknown origin. And that different theories suggests that, they are of Filane extraction or that they are a branch of Yoruba tribe or the Igara, whose identity have now merged with that of Okpoto in whose country they settled at the end of the fifteenth century and intermarried with them. The Apa tribe are said to have lived at Apa near Ibi and known to have fled from the Jukuns in about 1490 A.D, under the leadership of Chief Idoko who was accompanied by the Hausa. And that they first settled in Agatu, engaged in a war, and were defeated by the Jukuns, who took their canoes as spoil of war, and fought the refugee Apas along the Banks of river Benue and killing the Chief of the Apasin Amagidi village, east of Bagana. And that one of the chief's son Aiyagba Doko fled to Awuru market, and encamped there. Omeppa who was the head of all the Okpotos, which are probably the same race as Idoma, who occupied that whole region, now Bassa in Kogi State went peacefully to meet them and allowed them to settle in their midst. Erim (1981:15) on his part argues that depending on the period of investigation, Apa could mean a region of the Kwararafa Confederacy, when the Capital was further south, or the name for the Confederacy when by the seventeenth century, it had virtually shrunk to a Jukun State. Where is Apa? Who are its subjects remained as confused as ever. However for our study and in the light of Idoma oral traditions, we will suggest that, the ancestral homeland of the Idoma was most probably Apa when it was a region of the Kwararafa Confederacy before the sixteenth century. We arrived at this position because, Erim's second and third identities of Apa, merely represents geographical shifts in locational sites after the migrations of the Idoma commenced.

¹⁵ During fieldwork in Idoma July-September 1997, Erims's theory of Idu as the putative father of all Idoma was tested among 57 persons, 3 each from the different geographical areas of the 19 districts of Idoma, and none of these people could confirm his theory.

current Nassarawa State¹⁶ argues that the name Idoma is a corruption by colonial administrators of the ancient Doma, which he postulates was the pristine home of all Idoma, hence the reference to it as *Idoma n'ɔkwu*. However glorious this argument may look, there is no oral evidence in all of the twenty-two districts of Idoma to support Officer's view.¹⁷ Where then, does the word Idoma come from and who are they?

2.2 Who Are The Idoma?

The history of the origins of the Idoma is as problematic as the history of many other Nigerian peoples. This is particularly so because of the anthropological definition of the word origins. Anthropologically, origins refer to the emergence of species. To try and situate the origins of the Idoma people or any other people within the confines of this definition seems like embarking on a historical exercise that is devoid of primary evidence. This type of evidence is very important because the major distinguishing features between one African people and the other are usually language, culture and historical experience. For Idoma in particular, there are a few problems. For example, Idoma up to 1924 remained a pre-literate society. Moreover, archaeology, which could have given us some hard facts on the Idoma past, is still in its infancy. Despite this probable handicap, efforts have been made by a few researchers to help illuminate this seemingly difficult aspect of Idoma history. The researchers, armed with methodological tools that emphasise a multi-disciplinary approach, have been able to minimise slightly some of the difficulties and problems that are associated with Idoma origins. Notwithstanding as Erim has pointed out in his work, *The Idoma*

¹⁶ Doma was part of Plateau state, until 1996 when they became part of Nasarawa State, by Decree 1996 on State creation of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria.

*Nationality*¹⁸ to pose the question in this manner only compounds the problem of finding an answer. This is particularly so because the various groups which today collectively are called and refer to themselves as Idoma came from various sources and directions.¹⁹ For example, some of the Idoma migrants came from Apa and settled in the Kwararafa / Jukun Kingdom with common Idoma language. Meek²¹, suggested that the Idoma of Onyagede in Ohimini Local Government Area, Okpiko, Awume and Agadagba in Otukpo Local Government Area migrated from Ankpa in Kogi State, and that Agatu, in Agatu local Government Area, Akpa, Otukpo, Adoka, in Otukpo Local Government Area, Ocobo, Oglewu in Ohimini local Government Area, Igwumale, Ulayi and Ijibgan clans in Ado local Government Area migrated originally from Apa.²² Macleod in his report on the *Western Areas of Okwoga Division* suggested that Okpoga, and Ugbokolo in the current Okpokwu Local Government area came from Ida in Kogi State; Edumoga from the Benue region, and that Otukpa, Orokam, Owukpa and Ichama are a mixture of Okpoto and Igbos.²³ Brook, in his ethnographical report on *The Okpoto and Egedde Showing Connection with Neighbouring Tribes* argued that the Agilas in the Ado Local Government Area came to Ida from Apa and from there to their present location in Idoma²⁴. While some of these colonial anthropologists may be right in their various suggestions, very little evidence is found in the Idoma oral traditions in all of the Idoma districts as migrating from any where else other than Apa the ancestral home land of Idoma.

¹⁷ Officer's theory, like that of Erim was also tested during fieldwork in Idoma, July-September 1997, it could not be confirmed or attested.

¹⁸ See E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, 1981, p. 3.

¹⁹ For an interesting discussions on the various phases of the Idoma migrations, see E. O Erim *Idoma Nationality*, 1981.p.3 ff.

²¹ See C. K. Meek, "Ethnographical Report on Idoma Division" AR \ ANT \ 1 \ 6 Vol 1, 1925

²² See earlier note on Apa in page 5.

²³ See T. M, Macleod, (Capt) "Reports on the Western Areas of Okwoga Division" AR \ ANT \ 1 \ 6 Vol. 1 1925.

Therefore some scholars who made some attempts to locate the origins of the Idoma in most cases end up in some historical cul de sac.

Idoma as Armstrong suggested, for all intents and purpose is a linguistic appellation. His amateur study of the Idoma language suggests eight Idoma speaking people: Afu, Alago, Akeya, Etulo, Egedde, Yatche, Yala and Idoma.²⁵ Besides some dialectical differences, structurally and phonetically, all these groups with the exception of Igede and Akweya can be classified as Idoma-speaking. Within the Idoma unit of the language, Armstrong identifies four major dialectal divides. These are the northern dialects, made up of Agatu in Agatu Local Government Area and Ocekwu in Apa Local government Area, the central dialects comprising, Oglewu Onyagede in the current Ohimini Local Government Area, Adoka, Ugboju, and Otukpo in the Otukpo Local Government Area, the western dialects comprising of Edumoga, Ichama, Okpoga, Orokam, Otukpa and Owukpa, and the southern dialects made up of Agila, Igwumale, Ijibgam and Ulayi.²⁶ The identification of these dialects seems interesting, but fall short of the help it should have given us by leaving out some groups that are very crucial for any discussion on Idoma identity such as Ocobo.

However for the purpose of our study, our concern would be with the Idoma group that occupy Ado, Agatu, Apa, Ohimini, Ogbadibo, Okpokwu, Otukpo and Oju local government Areas of Benue State. These groups have common traditions that recognise 'Apa'²⁷ as their ancestral homeland from where they migrated to their

²⁴ See J. N. Brook, "Ethnographical Report on the Okpoto and Egedde Showing Connection with Neighbouring Tribes" AR \ ANT \ 1 \ 6 Vol., 1 1925.

²⁵ R. G. Armstrong, *Idoma Speaking Peoples*, 1955, p. 97.

²⁶ For full discussions on this dialectical classifications, see R. G. Armstrong, *Idoma Speaking Peoples*, 1955, p. 41ff, and p. 93 in particular.

²⁷ It is believed and supported by one of the most powerful oral tradition sources in Idoma-the Alekwu cultic traditions that the Idoma came from Apa in the defunct Kararafa/ Jukun kingdom, settled at

present day location. In all of Idoma there are two major reasons for the shift of the Idoma from their ancestral homeland. Firstly, There was a prolonged chieftancy dispute between Idoma and other subjects of Apa Kingdom in which it is believed that the Idoma apparently lost out in both the struggle and the subsequent civil strifes. This first view attributes the Idoma migration from Apa to a number of political crises, which degenerated into warfare with Idoma losing out.

Secondly, the available oral history points to *efunya*²⁸ –the horse war- as the cause of the Idoma migration out of Apa. One tradition has it that after leaving Apa, they settled in Igala land, from where they moved to the present Idoma location displacing its original inhabitants which some of the traditions claim are the Igede people. This second view identifies a protracted warfare between the Idoma and the Hausa Fulanis. It has been suggested that the *efunya* -the horse war that eventually drove the Idoma

different areas at different periods in history in the present day Idoma land. For more details on the location of Apa, see earlier note on p. 25.

²⁸ *efunya*-meaning horse war, refers to the invasion by the Hausa Fulanis in the early fifteenth century. The studies of the Kano chronicles had shown that two Kano kings: Yaji (1349-1385) and Kanajeji (1390-1419), led imperial and slave raiding campaigns into the Kararafa region where Apa the ancestral homeland of the Idoma was located. Other notable invaders at this period include Queen Amina of Zaria and Mai Idris Aloma of Borno who at different times attempted to subjugate the Kwararafa confederacy. By the end of the fifteenth century, Mai Ali Ghaji of Borno (1462-1518) terminated Kwararafa threat to his empire when he sacked the confederacy. This development not only led to a considerable shift in the location of the power base of the Abakwariga, but also eroded a good measure of their hegemony. With the decline of Abakwariga political power, their vassals, like the Jukuns became independent and attempted to fill the power vacuum reacted by the demise of Abakwariga power. This process meant the subjugation of formal vassals like the Idoma speaking peoples. These Idoma groups, faced with the possibility of losing their newly won independence and recolonization by the Jukun, decided to migrate southward. The Abakwariga objected to the Idoma migration, which resulted in war with the Idoma who fought with bow and arrow and the Hausa Fulanis with sword and spare on horse back, resulting in the Idoma calling the war *efunya*-horse war. This *efunya* is the principal cause of the Idoma migration to their present location. After the 1860, there was a collapse in the World Slave market. This decline in slave trade meant that the coastal supply of firearms was cut off. This gave the Hausa Fulanis a disadvantage over a lesser militarily equipped peoples of the Kwararafa kingdom such as Idomas, Igalas and Jukuns with their poisoned arrows. - *ɔyi efa*), leading to an increased resistance, especially by the Idoma, resulting in the Hausa Fulani's inability to override the Idoma.

out of Apa their ancestral home, refers to the invasions of the upper Benue and Gongola valleys in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century by the Hausas, Borno, Dingyi and Chamba peoples.²⁹

In the light of the discussions so far, it may be, rightly, suggested, that any analysis of the evolution of the Idoma ethnicity and identity that is not based primarily on the Idoma language, shared historical experience and to a lesser extent territory will not be a correct assessment or analysis of the Idoma people. This is why it is difficult for the Idoma people to accept Erim's argument that "the heterogeneous groups which today answer to Idoma did not have a common identity prior to the British rule in this part of Nigeria."³⁰

What of the common Idoma language, the unique Idoma culture and common shared historical experience, which in our view is one of the solid means of determining the identity of any given people? From Erim's observations, he seems to suggest that the only common factor that determines the identity of any given group is the unfortunate British colonial rule in that area. To any Idoma person one of the most binding factors that determines the Idoma identity is the Idoma language and culture which is unique and distinct to the Idoma people. A later chapter will unfold this argument in detail.

Erim's erroneous view on the Idoma identity was re-echoed again by another outside investigator on the Idoma people Patience Ahmed when she said, "it seems that before the British rule, the Idoma people did not have a common identity"³¹. What

²⁹ See earlier note on p. 29.

³⁰ E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, 1981, p.3.

³¹ P. Ahmed, "Idoma" in Lois K Fuller (ed.), *Rescue The Trophies*, Jos, CAPRO, 1994, p.15.

does Ahmed mean by common identity? If a common language and culture are to be accepted as the solid mark of a true identity of a given people, then both Erim and Ahmed were wrong in their sweeping generalisations on the Idoma identity.

The development of Idoma ethnicity has some link to a current extinct group called the *Akpoto*.³² Although the identification of this group and the nature of their real relationship with the Idoma remain very unclear, most of the students of Idoma history, and Idoma oral tradition agree to some extent that, some part of the present Idoma land was originally occupied by the *Akpoto*. Other groups including the ancestors of the Igala, Idoma and Ebira migrants gradually assimilated the *Akpoto*.³³

Other lines of inquiry that are available to us on the origin of Idoma ethnicity are the works of two colonial officers: Meek and Palmer. In 1925, Meek wrote:

...In the early Christian era, a greater portion of central Nigeria was occupied by races with names such as Mbum, Mbutu and

³² *Akpoto* - are said to be the original inhabitants of the present Idomaland, Others classified them as the Idoma. While their identity remains a matter of scholarship controversy, the Idoma refused completely either to be called *Akpoto* or referred to as such. During field work in Idoma July-September 1997, the view that the *Akpoto* could be the present Idoma people was tested in all the Idoma 22 districts. There is no oral tradition anywhere in Idoma, that would support Idoma been called or referred to as *Akpoto*.

³³ Erim suggested that the Idoma migrants retained part of the language of the *Akpoto* group, but rejected their name. However during the colonial period, the name *Akpoto* was used in a derogatory manner to refer to the Idoma. Oral traditions of the Igala, Ebira and Idoma all show that the *Akpoto* were the earliest inhabitants of the present territories of these groups. Both Armstrong and Ukwedeh support the view that the *Akpoto* played a major role in the formation of Igala, Idoma and Ebira Societies. Armstrong (1955:83ff) in particular argues that the Idoma together with the Yoruba and the Igala [all of which belongs to the Kwa language group] formed the same social complex within the upper Benue region until about six thousand years ago when this group disintegrated. His hypothesis was largely based on glottochronology and lexicostatistical data also posits that this proto-society had the same concept of time; worshipped a host of local gods; as well as observing similar taboos and totems, and that the society broke up when the Yoruba separated from the Idoma. Although Armstrong's argument attracted a number of criticisms such as the methodological defects inherent in lexicostatistics, and more specifically, the degree of the validity of inferences that can be drawn from anthropological linguistics. For instance, not all speakers of a language are derived from one tribe. This, however, does not invalidate the claim that a proto Yoruba-Igala-Idoma gave birth to the present Idoma. But how far this claim can be sustained remains a matter of scholastic controversy.

Mbafun which refers to tribes that had been driven into the central part of Cameroon and the southern provinces of Nigeria ...one of such groups were the Hau who are ancestors of the Doma hence the name Adamawa. Doma is also the Jukun word for subject peoples like the Idoma or Dama of present Benue Province.³⁴

Meek seems to be suggesting here that as early as the eighteenth century the Idoma or their ancestors were already resident within the upper Benue valley. But there is no evidence or record in Idoma, either oral or written, that suggests that the Doma people of the present Nassarawa State of Nigeria are the Idoma or the ancestors of the Idoma people of Benue State. Rather the Idoma of Benue State see the Doma people as their runaway children and slaves that live in the bush. Similarly, Palmer wrote that,

In 1918 during the time of Ibn Said there was an allusion to a king or kingdom situated in the Ngumatti district of Brono called Fali or M'bum. The Variants of the name Idoma include Doma, Doma or Damawa which refer to a particular people and their language.³⁵

These peoples according to Palmer were, subjected to a Jukun aristocracy who held sway over them through occult and spiritual influences³⁶. Again Palmer's view is another solitary hypothesis that has no base or support in the Idoma oral history and traditions. The early Arabic trader and European sources from which Meek and Palmer draw their conclusions, seems rather too slim and hardly enough to enable us to move from the realm of speculation to that of concrete historical experience especially those of Idoma origins.

Capt. F. Byng-Hall in his article "Northern Tribes and Emirates", argues that the Idoma probably

³⁴ C. K. Meek, "Ethnographical Report on Idoma Division" AR/ANT/1/6/Vol. 1, 1925.

³⁵ Palmer, "Ethnographical Report on Ngumatti District of Brono", 1921.

³⁶ Ibid.

were originally one and the same tribe as Okpoto, whose customs are similar, despite the traces of four hundred years of comparative civilisation through the intercourse and with the Apa, which the Idoma never enjoyed.³⁷

While he may be right that Idoma did not have a happy connection with Apa, the ancestral homeland of the Idoma, the Idoma as early discussions have shown rejected being called or identified as Okpoto or Akpoto people.

The one authentic and indigenous source that we can now turn to, in our quest for Idoma origin and the development of Idoma ethnicity is the oral documentary hypothesis as chanted in the *Alekwu* cultic folk music as to the origin of Idoma. In this regard we will provide the translation of the *Alekwu Abaje* chant³⁸ and the English transliteration to enable us established the Idoma pre-colonial history and origins. This was how *Alekwu Abaje* put it,

ÉÉÉÉÉYI	a call for attention
Idoma ðé'Adā nē e ma um	Idoma the home of the father
	that begot me
Ini nē Idoma ḡmá aa?	Where does Idoma come from?
ðí' wē ε gba kú Idoma aa	What is the root of Idoma?
Idoma tæ la Apá	Idoma used to live in Apa
Idoma wē əwa ðú' du	Idoma is crowd, power and wealth
εε le ḡmó'εε le lé	A Tiger kills, a Tiger eats
Ágábá le ḡmó, ágábá le lé	A Lion kills, a Lion eats
Idoma le ḡmó, ama ḡḡ	Idoma kills, but

³⁷ Capt. Byng-Hall "Northern Tribes and Emirates" in Forde, D., (ed.), in "Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence", in the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Part X*, London, 1955: 142.

<i>E ka Idoma ka o le ḥ</i>	They said, Idoma should not eat
<i>Idoma yá uwóooo</i>	Idoma exclaimed <i>Uwóooo</i>
<i>ēnyā I ya glá ḥ</i>	This can't be
<i>Unu gbo, efú gbo</i>	Fight started, war started
<i>Akpa ku Idoma le cē</i>	Idoma's bridge collapse
<i>Enyi le Idoma mulē</i>	Water overwhelms and swallows Idoma
<i>Ukpē kú Idoma nē</i>	It was the Idoma share
<i>e nyá Idoma aa</i>	that they refused Idoma
<i>tū dā' ēē nē</i>	Caused the fight that made
<i>Idoma ḥmá Apa aa</i>	Idoma to leave Apa
<i>ḥa kú nū</i>	Secondly
<i>ḍi bī dāēē' nē Idoma ḥmá Apá' aa</i>	Why did Idoma leave Apa?
<i>A kpò abḥ ḥ tá kwu Igbóanḥ nē o</i>	If you aim at a bird that is
<i>gaa wu, O gēe wu lāico fīyē'</i>	about to fly, it will fly higher
<i>efūḥnya wē abḥ ḥ tā amuomē</i>	Horse war is that last arrow aim
<i>nēfu Idoma ḥkwu ḥmá Apá' a</i>	that finally moved Idoma from Apa
<i>Apá, ajē ḥkēkpē'</i>	Apa a land of ḥkēkpē
<i>ajē o jē ḥná jēōgwō</i>	A land that is enough for food and drink
<i>Eko nē Idoma ḥmá Apá' a</i>	when Idoma left Apa
<i>Ée ga ajē kú ujukwum, Idá'</i>	They went to the land of Jukun, Ida
<i>ēē nē ee fu ajē Idoma, nyā aá'</i>	Before they came to the present
	Idomaland

³⁸ The tape of the Alekwu Aboje chant which was recorded during fieldwork in 1980 for the Idoma Bible translation work is with the present writer.

Aje nē ɔwɔje lɛuwá aa³⁹

A land that their Lord gave to them

It could be observed from this authentic Idoma oral historical source that the Idoma was originally living in Apa. And things seemed to be going well, they grew, multiplied and they were rich and powerful. However, at certain stage of their stay in Apa they were refused a well deserved honour or dignity in Apa.⁴⁰ The Idoma felt that was unfair in that as the saying goes in Idoma, the lion hunts and eats the tiger, why were the Idoma refused their well earned position or honour or power? They fought for this, and they lost out in the fight. From that moment they started thinking of when to leave Apa. The last straw that broke the camel's back was the *ɛfɔnya* – the horse war that we referred to earlier in our discussions⁴¹ that finally moved Idoma from Apa their ancestral homeland. When they left Apa, they travelled via Wukari, and Ida to their present Idomaland.

In the light of our discussions so far, it could be concluded that the Idoma came from Apa the defunct Kwarafa Jukun Kingdom in the current Taraba State of Nigeria, settled at different areas at different periods in history in the present day Idomaland. The Idoma had to migrate from Apa due to a number of political crises which degenerated into a warfare with Idoma losing out, and *ɛfɔnya* – the horse war, which refers to the invasion of the Kwarafa Kingdom by the Hausa Fulanis in the early fourteenth century.⁴²

³⁹ Alekwu Abɔje chant, 1980.

⁴⁰ According to His Royal Highness, Late Dr. Abraham Ohpabi, The Agabaidu of Idoma, When asked during fieldwork for Bible translation on the 7th of July 1980 on What was the honour that the Idoma were refused in Apa, he replied, “this honour that the Idoma were refused was in relation to a Chieftancy title which was theirs as a result of achievements in war, ethical standard of the Apa community, and the chronological list of succession to the Chieftancy office.

Who are the Idoma? Could the evidence of material culture answer this question? The Idoma up to the coming of Christianity, the Jukun and the Hausa fulanis were not able to absorb them. Rather, the Idoma had been able to resist being absorbed until the coming of Christianity. Why were the Idoma able to resist all forms of absorption prior to the coming of Christianity? This was due to their very firm or tight internal organisations through family, community, social organisations, the pattern of Idoma agriculture and the unique Idoma culture.

2 . 3 Idoma Social Organizations And Pre-Colonial Political Systems And

Economy

2.3.1 *Ipúnu*

*Ipu*nu⁴³ is the basic primary unit of the Idoma social structure. This consists of the man as the head of *Ipúnu*, his wife or wives⁴⁴, their children and their sons wives and children. *Ipúnu* normally will occupy an area of family land with a group of houses around the open space, with each wife having her own house, and the man with his own house. There are also other huts within the *Ipúnu* such as *Inu*gɔ̃ - granaries, with grinding stones and *Itákpa* which is the central meeting place of any *Ipúnu* in Idoma.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See earlier discussion on pages 29-30.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Ipu*nu is the primary Idoma family.

⁴⁴ As earlier observed, a man is culturally allowed to marry more than one wife in Idoma.

⁴⁵ For further details on the role of *Ipu*nu in the Idoma society, see Otukpo Local Government Archives, Idoma social, political, and Economic Organisations, 1958.

2.3.2 *Ipúᵐa*

Closely related to *Ipúᵐnu* is the *Ipúᵐa*⁴⁶. *Ipúᵐa* in most cases is the male ancestry line made up of a very careful sub-lineage of the *Ipúᵐa* - that is those who are of the same birth. *Ipúᵐa* can expand with several related *Ipúᵐa* constituting themselves into a wider lineage. *Ipúᵐa* are to some extent a political unit normally possessing a more or less unified identifiable piece of land, whose members are related to one another in the male lineage and can undoubtedly claim their descent from a common male ancestor. According to the *ᵐceidᵐa*, the Agabaidu of Idᵐa, their names are distinctively called “ai” meaning “sons”. *Ipúᵐa* is not exogamous, though it is highly stressed and considered a good thing to marry outside one’s *ipúᵐnu* and possibly one’s *ipúᵐa*. It is a however a known rule in Idᵐa that persons that have either a common father’s father or mother’s mother should not marry each other.⁴⁷

2.3.3 *ᵐpu* a group of *ipuᵐa* forms a bigger unit called *ᵐpu*.⁴⁸ The formation of *ᵐpu* again is traced to the male ancestral common lineage. *ᵐpu* is currently one of the strongest political units in Idᵐa life from the pre- colonial Idᵐa until now. As later discussions will highlight, they are the determining factors of Christianity entering or making contact with any Idᵐa group of persons. The head of the *ᵐpu* is the *ᵐce* - chief, who is the *ᵐnyākwúᵐce* - the most senior elder. He is the *ᵐŋdūajε* - the custodian owner of the Land. This makes him the owner of the *AJε* Shrine-where the whole *ᵐpu* comes to *pá ajε* - worship and sacrifice to the land at the *ikpóajε* - the

⁴⁶ This is the Idᵐa patrilineage.

⁴⁷ This view was confirmed as a general practice in the whole of Idᵐa, by the *ᵐceIdᵐa* the paramount chief of the Idᵐa people during fieldwork interview in his office in July 16th, 1997.

⁴⁸ *ᵐpu* is the Idᵐa clan and a bigger family unit in Idᵐa. *ᵐpu* embraces more that two families.

earth-shrine., and the ancestral cult *Alekwu* and in this capacity he is known and addressed as *Adāalēkwū*-the father of the dead or the ancestors spirits.

2.3.4 *ayi* :Idoma Mini State

By *ayi*⁴⁹ the Idoma mini-state, we use state in this context to mean a body of persons politically and culturally organised in a given territory with a sovereign character. The primary purpose of the Idoma mini state is to maintain law and order by a system of law that is applicable to the Idoma society. The mini-state concept here may, also, refer to a society that lacked powerful royal dynasties or highly centralised government. The Idoma mini state lacks the urban capitals, and had small populations and occupied small territories usually referred to as *Ipuḍma*. The basic building unit of the Idoma mini-state as earlier discussed was the partrilineage *Ipuḍpu*, which in its biological-territorial settings is made up of one or more lineages *Ipuḍma* who identify a common ancestor. Men who had acquired status through age and wealth ran the government of the pre-colonial Idoma mini-state. Collectively these men are referred to as *ai-gābḍ*⁵⁰ or council of the elders. These men together with a recognised *ḍce'* - chief oversee the various institutions through which their state is administered. The *Ōjila*-village community council was one of most important of these institutions.⁵¹ The *Ōjila* is the general assembly made up of adult male family heads in each *Ipuḍnu*. According to the Idoma tradition and the testimony of Mrs. Obo Okpabi,⁵² women and children may attend these councils, but, while the children are only there to listen

⁴⁹ *ayi* could also be defined as the Idoma higher step of regional confederacy.

⁵⁰ *Ai-gabḍ* are the titles for the community office holders. They serve as councillors in their various portfolios or offices in the community.

⁵¹ For further details about the roles of *ojila* in the Idoma community, see Elaigwu, J "Self-Regulation in a Traditional Society: Integration and Order in Pre-Colonial Otukpo of Nigeria", 1973. And R.G. Armstrong, "Idoma kings: The Nature of Their Office and Their Changing States", 1972. These are unpublished seminar papers of The University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

⁵² Mrs. Obo Okpabi, fieldwork interview, 20th August 1996. Obo is the most senior wife of His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idoma.

and learn, the most elderly women who are classified and given male status⁵³ may have a say or contribution to make at this assembly on behalf of the women. This *ojila* serves as a primary legislative adjunct to the community's body politic. The *ojila* approves the election results into the lineage head and other important titles. They are also responsible for sanctioning and implementing group functions, i.e., public works, state festivals, and mobilisation of able-bodied men for war. All the activities of *Ójila* are however carefully controlled and monitored by the council of elders, who in our view are the real leaders and rulers of the Idoma.⁵⁴

Next to *Ójila* is the *ai-uta* - sons of justice, which were made up of Idoma youths with the responsibilities of enforcing the directives from the *Ójila* and lineage head. They collected fines, physically dealt with individuals or group offenders and supplied the bulk of the military force for the community. As Magid correctly noted, because the *ai-uta* were primarily an enforcement agency, their field of operations was usually difficult to monitor and control. They therefore, had the propensity, and often did become a power of their own once they were mobilised.⁵⁵ As a result of this, the elders seldom mobilised them until it became absolutely necessary to do so.

The maintenance of law and order, correction of social evils and punishment of those who breached the laws of the Idomaland were vested in the hands of a number of societies: *Ínyín ñkpín*, *Owuna*, *Achukwu*, and *Ikpókwi*.⁵⁶ However, membership of

⁵³ These are very elderly women who have long passed menopause, who are classified as having the ability to communicate with the ancestors on behalf of the Idoma women.

⁵⁴ For details of this view, see Justice Anyebe, A. P, "The Idoma secrets", 1975. Unpublished paper.

⁵⁵ A. Magid, "District Councillorship in an African Society: a Study in role and Conflict", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

⁵⁶ These are male secret societies that women are denied membership of. The women are also barred from seeing some of the masquerades of these societies, especially, the *Achukwu*, as doing so will result in their becoming barren, or they will *kpoebi* - that is committing a taboo, that will require

these societies according to Chief Oko, The Agbo of Ocobo, were restricted to male adults who have distinguished themselves in war, hunting and agriculture.⁵⁷ As earlier noted, the government of each mini-state was run by a council of elders-the *Anyākwú* ɔ̃ɛ, with some having a specialised portfolio which necessitated their daily interactions with the lineage head ɔ̃ɛ. Such *Aigab* ɔ̃ are the ɔ̃ɛayi, *Aidokoanya*, and ɔ̃mádáci ejilá. They could be rightly described as the right hand men of the lineage head. Of lesser *Aigab* ɔ̃ are the *Achadu* - the royal undertaker and king maker, ɔ̃kǎǎ - the administrator of Sassed ordeal, ɔ̃éfu' - the commander in chief of the Army and the ɔ̃kpácu' - the land administrator or land distributor and ɔ̃ɛolihi - market administrator. In the Idoma tradition, these lesser titles are not hereditary, but acquired with age and wealth. The emphasis here is on individual achievement, e.g., execution of enterprise or spectacular physical courage in the defence of the community or the execution of a dangerous mission. Later chapters will highlight the roles of these Idoma titleholders in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

At the apex of all Idoma mini-states is the ɔ̃ɛ' - Chief or Lineage head. This is the most senior office in the mini-state. According to the traditional office of the *Acadu*⁵⁸ of Idomaland ɔ̃ɛ is chosen in consideration of age signifying genealogical proximity to the ancestors. Also personal wealth and valour are essential in choosing

specific animal and bird sacrifices in order to purify them, and for their womb to be opened again for child birth.

⁵⁷ Chief Oko, The Agbo of Ocobo, *Idoma Bible Translation Fieldwork Interview*, 12th December, 1982.

⁵⁸ In the Idoma tradition, the *Acadu* of Idomaland is the royal undertaker and the king maker. His office is both political and spiritual in his choice of a new king, and as he consults the Aje-earth goddess and Alekwu-the ancestors before a king is chosen. Traditionally, the *Achadu* must be a male as women especially the young ones who have not reached menopause yet, are not allowed to be an eye witness some of the initiation rites of a new king, and when a king is being buried.

which member of the senior *Aigab* - ministers becomes the $\text{ɔcɛ}'$. The Idoma $\text{ɔcɛ}'$ is not first among equals. Although both the *Aigab* and *Ojila* could curtail certain aspects of his power, he wielded real power as far as the people of his state were concerned. For instance, acting with the *Aigab*, he could promulgate *ine* - laws or ordinances that had the force of law. Any individual or community who breached these ordinances was summarily dealt with. In the Idoma tradition, the $\text{ɔcɛ}'$ enjoyed certain privileges that set him apart from even the senior *Aigab*. For example, the skins of such animals as lions, tigers or leopards killed within his domain went to him. So did the hind legs of cows and buffaloes. He also received portions of fines collected by the *Uta* and the $\text{ɔcɛ}'\tilde{\text{olihi}}$ and could confiscate disputed properties or stray slaves and animals found in his domain. All these are fixed obligations. Outside these fixed obligations the $\text{ɔcɛ}'$ received gifts from numerous favour seekers, and portion of meat from animals killed during communally organised hunts or festivals, such as *Ejealekwu* festival, the *Ajɔ̃pā* festival.⁵⁹ The $\text{ɔcɛ}'$ is the both religious and political head of Idoma. In places where this is not so, he plays the role of communicating the wishes of the ancestors to his people and vice versa. This in fact accounts for the elaborate cultural rituals⁶⁰ undertaken before a titled elder assumes the position of $\text{ɔcɛ}'$. These rituals religiously legitimised the office and articulated its political authority. For example, during the $\text{ɔcɛ}'$'s installation, he dies to his family and all his lineage attachments. He loses all his personal belongings to the society as a whole. The Alekwu ancestral mask performs the burial ceremony of $\text{ɔwɛo h'ɛklá}'$

⁵⁹ For further details of some of the privileges the Idoma enjoys, see R. G. Armstrong, "The Idoma Kings: The Nature of Their Office and Their Changing States", 1974. Unpublished paper of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

⁶⁰ These rituals are top secrets that are not to be talked, discussed or written about. However, if you are a male indigenous Idoma man, you could under an oath of secrecy be allowed to read, Justice A. P. Anyebe's unpublished paper, "The Idoma Secrets", 1975.

okwū - this is the opening of the path to the grave, and to the spirit world for him. He at this point loses his personal identity as Mr. A, or B, and loses all the obligations that he owes to the individuals and even to his own family. He becomes a king, owning no property or wealth of his own, but as a king he owns the whole land and its citizens⁶¹

2.3.5 *ḡḡ* *ḡḡ* *Anyā* - AGE GROUP, SLAVERY AND WOMEN.

2.3.5.1. *ḡḡ* - age groups are a highly developed association in Idoma. Its principal aim is a mutual aid club for social activities. They work and relate to one another in units, and always act on the collective voice of the group. However, they are not outside the control of the village elders. Should their activities become suspicious, the whole age group set would be invited to the council of elders for discussions and explanations. The outcome of such meetings is usually a caution, or a ban on that particular age group for a limited time or indefinitely for a very serious problem. We will later highlight the significance of the age group in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity later in chapter seven on the Idoma Christianity today.

2.3.5.2. *ḡḡ* - Slavery Idoma was repeatedly overrun and raided for slaves by the Hausa Fulanis, who had a slave market in Onyagede called *Olohiabakpa*- Hausa market, where slaves were brought from other parts of the North and sold to the slave traders for onward transportation via the Ida coast to the western countries.⁶² The Idoma would in a few situations keep a number of slaves themselves, but would never sell into slavery another Idoma person, with the exception of an uncontrollable village thug, that the whole community disowned, and no longer required his or her presence

⁶¹ For full details of the chief's installation ceremonies and rituals, see R. G. Armstrong, "The Dynamics and Symbolism of Idoma Kingship" in *West African Cultural Dynamics*, Mouton, 1979.

among the Idoma community. Instead of killing such a person, he or she would be sold as a slave, but the parents of that person have the right of ransom in order to bring him or her back to the community on an oath undertaking that such a person would be of good behaviour, and will in no way be a threat or menace to the community any more. In the Idoma thought, a slave is a person without parents or relatives to defend him or her. Chief Owuna of Ocobo, told me in one of my interviews with him when he was asked, 'how did the Idoma get their slaves?' He answered, "in the European slave trade days, if you find a stranger either man or woman in Idoma, and not related to anyone, that stranger could either be killed for sacrifice, sold as a slave or kept as a son or daughter or as a wife".⁶³ That is why the Idoma concept of freeing a slave *n kwu ugboga*, *ɔfiye a I piya ɔyi um, mla ɔnya m* - means, 'I made the stranger or the unknown person my son, or daughter or wife'.

2.3.5.3. Anya - women in Idoma are generally thought of very highly. Though they may be excluded from certain councils and societies that are exclusively for men, just like similar societies exist exclusively for women, they are mostly involved in the day to day life of the Idoma people and in decision-making. However, they must not be openly seen to be dictating to their husband or older men what to do. The Idoma women are respectfully greeted with the appropriate titles of their birth such as "*Ai-Ágbo, ɔi - kɔ, On ɲ-je, Ai-dóogwu, ɔɔ-ga*"⁶⁴, thereby giving them a very high degree of respect and identity and a very strong sense of belonging. In the Idoma tradition,

⁶² For details of slave trade in the Idoma area, see M. Manson, "Population Density and Slave Raiding: The Case of the Middle Belt of Nigeria" *Journal of African History*, 1969, p. 10 ff.

⁶³ Chief Owuna, The Agbo of Ocobo, fieldwork interview, 30th July 1977.

⁶⁴ These are Idoma women traditional title greetings that reflects their identities before and after marriage. It is a pre-fix "ai" children of, plus the name of their ancestral father or town i.e., "ai - Agbo", - Children of Agbo. This Agbo is normally regarded and accepted as the putative father of the whole of that village or community.

once the Idoma women are married, all that they are and have belongs to their husband.⁶⁵

2.4 Agriculture

Like most other African societies in the pre-and postcolonial era agriculture was, and still remains, the most important economic activity of the Idoma people. This is seen in terms of both the Idoma that are engaged either in full time or part time farming, and the prestige that this carries among the Idoma. As Okwu rightly noted, in Idoma they would, in most cases, measure a man's success not only in the size of his family and compound, or the numbers of his wives and children, but most importantly, in the size of his farm and his yam and grain barns.⁶⁶

However the antiquity of agriculture in Idoma is difficult to determine in absolute terms. Oral evidence suggests that agriculture pre-dated the Idoma migration from Apa whose kings are always referred to in the *Alekwū* Cultic Chant as *Ōndú' eh̄mla ɔ̄bā* - that is - the lords of agriculture and stockpiler of grains.⁶⁷ The significance of agriculture in both the pre- and postcolonial Idoma can be viewed in two perspectives: First, agriculture's close association with religion.⁶⁸ Second, the fact that the entire calendar year in Idoma revolves around agriculture. As we will see later in the discussion, the mother earth *Ajε* sustained the Idoma at two levels. First, at the level of the Idoma material livelihood, and second, as a repository of the remains of

⁶⁵ Although, this used to be the general practice in Idoma, it is sadly being eroded away in Idoma today as the result of Western influence and education. However, some parts of Idoma, especially the western Idoma sticks to this practice till today.

⁶⁶ V.G. Okwu, "Early History of Idomaland", Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, seminar, 1974.

⁶⁷ A. P. Anyebe, "Idoma secrets", 1974, unpublished source.

the Idoma person. These are the reasons why all matters concerning the Idoma relationship with the *aje* - earth, would be carefully pursued later in our discussion.

The peak point of religious observance was the ancestral feast of the *Ejealekwu* festival,⁶⁹ where, stock is taken of the previous season in Idoma and prayers and offerings are made to the ancestors to consolidate their continued support in the next season, and correct the ills, if any, of the previous season. This ancestral feast symbolised the unity of the Idoma community tied by bonds of blood and marriage to the sustaining *aje* - earth. However the timing and the celebration of this ancestral feast that is the main bond of unity in the Idoma community had been the main bone of contention, controversy, and conflict in the interaction between Idoma and Christianity. Secondly, the Idoma year *Ihayi*, and its component parts, $\rightarrow\bar{a}$ -month, revolved around agriculture and the climate seasons. Subsequently the Idoma new year began and closed with the ancestral feast of the *Eje Alekwu*. After this came the period of land preparation with the first rain, then came tilling, sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storing in that order.⁷⁰ All of these last from about March till late October or November. Other non- agricultural activities, e.g., hunting and craft manufacture were done between late November and Early March. Fishing is done between July and November when the annual floods swelled the river. Idoma has two recognised agricultural systems: these are shifting cultivation and bush fallowing. The high point of the Idoma agricultural year was the harvest of yams, when the farmers reaped the fruits of their labours. Central to a successful harvest was proper storage.

⁶⁸ Our later discussion on the *aje oopa*-the earth festival and sacrifice in the next chapter will fully illustrate this point.

⁶⁹ See later discussion in the next chapter for details of this festival.

⁷⁰ For further details, see R.G. Armstrong, *Idoma Speaking Peoples*, 1955: 65ff.

This is very significant in that it has a very direct bearing on the quality and quantity of food that would not only see the family through to the next harvest, but also provide them with enough seed for the next planting season, and enough surpluses to exchange for goods which they did not produce. In all these, quick and proper storage is essential, as it will reduce the danger posed by pests both human and animal.

The annual cycle of Idoma agriculture is that of hoeing agriculture during the raining season and hunting with bush fire in the dry season. Most of the crops grown in Idoma are *Ihī*, *Ocīkāpā*, *Igwu*, *Eje*, *Igbankpa*, *Ologō*, *Obōnū*, *Akei*, *Ógege*, *eyē*. These are yams, rice, guinea corn, beans, maize, cassava, groundnut, melon, sweet potatoes and, millet. And other fruits like *Angbō*, *ḡalē*, *Aja*, *Ape*, *oleké*, and *Alemú* – banana, pineapple, mangoes, pawpaw, sugarcane and oranges.

2. 5 Idoma Culture And Traditions

Culture as generally used according to Sanneh “has to do with customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious and social group.”⁷¹ Newbiggin viewed culture as the sum total of ways of living that is “developed by a group of human beings and handed down from generation to generation”.⁷² Culture has also been defined by Matthew Arnold in his essay “Culture and Anarchy” as not just “the scientific passion for pure knowledge ‘but the moral and the social passion for doing good in order to make reason and the will of God prevail”⁷³

⁷¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering The West. Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1993, p. 26.

⁷² Lesslie Nwebigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Geneva: World Council of Churches; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986, p. 3.

⁷³ Matthew Arnold, “Culture and Anarchy” in *Selected Prose*, ed., P. J. Keating, London, Penguin Classics 1987, p. 207.

Given these three definitions, we employ culture in this thesis with particular regard to the Idoma customary beliefs, social forms and norms, language and religious beliefs. These are the Idoma body of beliefs, manners and practices that are handed down from one Idoma generation to another without necessarily being reduced to writing. The process of passing this from one generation to another could be described as traditional. For our purpose, this is a useful working definition. However, a few features deserve further elaboration. First, at the heart of the Idoma culture is a body of ideas which seeks to explain the why and how of things. These ideas help shape the Idoma values and attitudes or reactions that enabled judgements to be made. Second, among the Idoma people, culture is a social phenomenon. It is what holds the Idoma community together, and gives them the sense of identity. It is probably right to suggest that no behaviour is in-born. It is acquired and passed on from one generation to another through, language, stories, rituals, music and art forms. Thirdly the Idoma culture is subject to change as a result of intrusion of new ideas, other cultures and religion. We will explain three parts of the Idoma culture that have direct bearings on our discussion on the Idoma interaction with Christianity.⁷⁴

2.5.1 Birth.

According to the Idoma tradition, the whole act of conception in Idoma is a sign that the ancestor is pleased with the earthly family, and desires to share fellowship with the family again by coming into this life in the form of re-incarnation in a baby. A pregnant woman is therefore protected from the power of the evil ones i.e., *ṣhε*, and

⁷⁴ We will later discuss in chapter seven, how these three cultural practices had been the bone of contention, controversy and conflict in the interaction between Idoma and Christianity, and the later contributions to Idoma Christianity.

*Anjēnu*⁷⁵ by various sacrifices on the part of the husband and the in-laws. Sacrifices are specially made to *Alekwu*⁷⁶, or the ancestors or the divinities such as, *Anjēnu*, *᠑w᠑ ejēbi*, *Íbobo* etc. in order to ensure the safe delivery of the baby. It is believed in most parts of Idoma that every secret act of adultery by a pregnant woman before or during the pregnancy must be confessed, and sacrifices made to the ancestors and other divinities, or else she will surely die during the child-birth.⁷⁷

Before the child is born *Ogwoeba* - the soothsayer is consulted to know the type of child who is coming, and which of the ancestors is re-incarnating in the baby, and to determine the future of that child.⁷⁸ When this is determined, the ancestor is appeased in a form of sacrifice, and prayerfully urged to arrive safely without complications, as the whole family is expecting his or her return to and reunion with the family.

When the child is eventually born, according to the tradition the child is taken into the room with the mother and is not allowed out until the seventh day when the child will be named and circumcised or her ears pierced if she is a girl.⁷⁹ The significance of the child and the mother remaining in the room for seven days before the child is brought out will be later examined. We will also highlight the implications this has in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. The mother would remain unclean for those seven days, after which some sacrifices would be made to the ancestors and other divinities to make her ceremonially clean again.

⁷⁵ These are witches, and personal water spirits.

⁷⁶ See later discussion on *Alekwu*.

⁷⁷ This was witnessed on 3rd June 1969, when Anya᠑le died during childbirth according to the traditional belief as a result of unconfessed adultery before and during pregnancy. A later attempt to confess and make the necessary sacrifice, when she was gasping for breath was too late to save her life.

⁷⁸ Although this is not a wide or general practice in Idoma today, perhaps as a result of the influence of Christianity on the Idoma, however, this is a current cultural practice in Idoma.

In some parts of Idoma on the seventh day, all the elders of the village are sent for very early in the morning at cock crow to assemble where the child will be named and circumcised, and dedicated to ḐwḐ or *Anjēnū*.⁸⁰ It is very important for us to carefully note here what happens in this act of naming ceremony as we will critically examine and analyse the events later in chapter seven on the Idoma Christianity today. The sequence of events here is very interesting:

1. The Elders all gather in a semi circle at the entrance of the house where the baby and the mother are staying.
2. The *ogwó'ebā*-soothsayer is consulted whether it is right for the baby to come out or not. This is done with the beating of *Oke*⁸¹ and the Soothsayer communicating with the world of the Spirit through *anwa* or *eba Aje*. He receives answers from the world of the Spirit and communicates this to the elders.
3. The elders, after being satisfied with the message from the world of the Spirit, ask that the child be brought out.

⁷⁹ These are current practices which is still going on in Idoma at the time of this writing.

⁸⁰ These are personal gods or guardian angels. During fieldwork in Agila, 18th August 1997, I was told by Ogbogo, a retired 70 year old teacher, the timing of this ceremony must be in the morning, as that is the only time to get the attention of the ancestors before they begin their day to day business. His argument looked credible as most serious business is conducted very early in the morning in Idoma.

⁸¹ Oke is a big traditional metal gong of about two to eight feet long, played with a smooth wood to invoke the attention of the ancestors or spirits, through the soothsayer to an occasion of prayers or important ceremonies in the community. The soothsayer also uses oke in communicating with the world beyond. This is followed by *eba anwa* -that is a shell of a specific spiritual tree used by the soothsayer in his acts of divination to ascertain the minds of the ancestors.

4. A family friend who is very kind, of good reputation, hard working and some how wealthy will on behalf of the family bring the baby out with the mother dressed in her best cloths and a group of her own friends following behind.
5. The oracle is consulted to determine the name of the child, when this is ascertained, the child is named in this order:
 - A) He is lifted and placed in the arm of the most senior elder or the Soothsayer facing the east. He had to face the east, because it is generally believed among the Idoma that life begins in the east and that human beings like the sun begin with childhood in the east, where the sun rises, through adulthood and sun set in the west where they are buried facing the west. There life sets again to re-emerge in the east in the Idoma ever-cyclic motion of birth, dying and rebirth.
 - B) The child is given a name that reflects the family history or an event in the family or the community or the entire *Ipuoma*: such as, *Adak̄le*, *en̄k̄le*, *Alac̄le*, *ɔgb̄le* - he or she is come to guard his house. *Óojum* - It is enough for me or I am tired of all the troubles *ɔɔ̄le*, *Alechenu*, *ɔ̄ine* brother, *en̄le* - mother is back. *ɔw̄icon̄le*, *Oc̄fú*, *Ikw̄ubīdā*, *Of̄ikw̄u*, *Owun̄le*, *Anȳle*.⁸²
 - C) The child, still in the arm of the elder or the holy man, will be given the following symbolic gifts with the following words:

⁸² *Adakūle*- if the head of the family dies, and a male child is born immediately after his death that child is called *Adakūle*, meaning the father of the family is come back to look after his family, and vice versa for a mother, and the girl is called *en̄kūle*, meaning the mother of the house is back. If there is a sudden death in the family, and the main bread winner is gone, and a girl is born immediately after his death, she is called *Ikwubiela*- meaning death spoils matters and things. *Alechenu* means the unexpected has happened. This name is only given when a family had a surprise, or wins a war or a barren woman became pregnant and had a baby. *Alace* symbolises disaster, ruin and hopelessness. This name is given only to the girls when a family lost a war or the only man in the family lineage dies and no hope of the patrilineal continuity of the family, and a girl is born after all these hopeless situations, she is called *Alace*, meaning ruin or the glory is departed.

- (i) *Ikpootuta*⁸³ *Nyila, ka ayi wɔ ko leɛka ikpootuta'aa* - multiply and
may your seed be like the seed of this *Ikpootuta*,
alligator pepper
- (ii) *Ije* *ɔwɔ nɛ o tu wɔ waa ko le ije je ga wɔ, ka a le*
gboagbenu' nɛ ɔwɔ i je ga wɔ aa - May you grow to
be a rich and have as much wealth as your Lord will
give you
- (iii) *Een'kpɔ ɛganɛ een'kpɔ i le alɛ la duuma η ma, a le alɛ a*
duuma' η duu - As water is a friend of all and enemy of
none, may you be a friend of all and enemy of none.
- (iv) *Anɔle* *ɔnyɛ ku odule wɛ anɔ nɛ, anɔ ke i je ipi aa, oyɔyi*
ku wɔ ko le le ɔnyɛ tu odiudu' acɛ, ɛga duuma nɛ agbe
mla ɔɔyɔ, le agbe ɔma ta, ka a le ipi ɔma je. - As
palm oil sweetens and smoothes difficult things, may
your life sweeten other lives and smoothen difficult
situations. Palm oil also heals. Where ever there is
wound and pain heal that wound and pain Be sweet and
peaceful.
- (v) *ɔma* *ɔma wɛ ɔnyɛ ku ɔna aa, ɛga duuma nɛ ɔma yɔ abɔ i*
gee wa η, wɛ ɔnyɛ le alɔ, le alɔ tu ηma oowa mla ipi
- As salt sweetens food and preserves from decay, may
your life sweeten other lives and preserve others and our
community from decay and smell

⁸³ This is an alligator pepper.



(vi) *éḡm' ɔɛnɛ o bi éḡm' waa, bi oyɔ̄eyī wa, éḡm' kē lɛ ɔnyɛ,*
aman ḡ o ke h' ɔɔ duu. - He who brings kola brings
 life. May your life bring life; As kolanut is bitter and
 sweet, your life may be bitter, but, you will come out
 sweet, just like sweet water after a bitter kolanut.⁸⁴

The child then is shown to the entire elders and all those present, and
 his name is repeated by all three times.

- D The child would then be dedicated at the entrance of the family shrine to *ɔwɔ*
 or *Anjəñū* - personal god by the priest.
- E He will then, be circumcised or her ears pierced.
- F This would be followed by a feast, singing and dancing, and some gifts
 presented to the mother. The husband will kill a white cock for his wife, who
 will eat all of the cock by herself, if she chooses not to share it with any one,
 but not the gizzard, which must be given to the elder. This white cock is
 symbolic of the husband's happiness.

2. 5. 2 Marriage

Marriage is a very essential binding fabric of the Idoma people. A lot of work, care
 and preparations are put into this. Marriage in Idoma is not primarily between the two
 people concerned, but the two families of the couple, and their related families. As we
 will later find out in chapter seven, marriage is a major contributing factor to what we
 regard as Idoma Christianity today.

⁸⁴ Ikpootuta, is alligator pepper; ije is money; eenḡkpɔ is water; anɔole - palm oil; ɔma-salt and
 ɛḡmɛ is kola nut.

In the Idoma tradition when a boy is old enough to desire being married, he will be tested to know if he will be capable of marrying and supporting a home, his wife and children. His father will give him some seed yams to plant, or a hunting gun. He will then be instructed to provide food for his father and mother and the rest of the family for a period of not less than a year from his farm or the game that he hunts. If he is eventually found to be capable of providing effectively for his parents and the rest of the family, he will then be considered eligible to marry, and will be officially permitted by his parents to do so.⁸⁵

However, this does not mean that he will go out openly to look for a woman. His parents privately and strictly monitor his interests. When he eventually becomes very interested in a particular girl, he informs his parent, his mother in particular, of his interest. His mother then will visit the girl's family, and work very hard to establish friendship with the girl's mother. After being good friends to each other for about six months to one year, the boy's mother will reveal her intention by saying to the girl's mother, *Ugwū lē ɔyi hē ɔ lē wɔ, an ɔ n wa ga lā eei á* - A hen hatched chicks in your house and I have come to buy one of them, or by telling her, *N má ɔdā eei ɔ lē wɔ, ɔdā ɔ mā ke hi um ɔ tū ka n le le lā ɔyi um* - I saw something in your house, which I love so much, and I want to have that thing for my son *Koicōoo, ku oklōbia ɔ lē um ko wā ɛga iyī wɔ* - Please can my young man come to visit you?⁸⁶ When this

85. During fieldwork in Agila in Ado Local Government Area on the 18th of August 1997, Chief Odang Ogenyi the traditional ruler of the Agila people when asked about the importance of this practice in Idoma, maintained that, this was the most crucial test of the Adulthood of a man. He felt that, this practice is really what makes a man in Idoma. Although, this testing of a man at a certain stage is still practiced in Idoma, it is more practised among the Agila, than the rest parts of Idoma. In some part of Idoma, such as Otukpo, it could be correctly stated that this practice is gradually been forgotten.

⁸⁶ This is a common approach that is generally practised in Idoma up to the time of this writing. The importance of this practice among the Idoma people was tested on His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, the Agabaidu of Idoma during fieldwork in Otukpo on the 10th of July 1996 when asked when is a marriage legitimate in Idoma? He responded by saying that, when proper steps are taken by the parents and a proper request made by the mothers of the men who are to marry, that is when a marriage is recognised in Idoma, as it begins the solid foundation of marriage in Idoma.

is agreed, the boy will then begin to visit and spend time with the potential mother-in-law, but he must never come near the girl in any way. As soon as the boy arrives at the girl's family home, she disappears. The father will be silently watching all this without getting involved, until it reaches his level. When the boy has shown his presence in the girl's family, each of the two families then will carry out private investigations into the background of the other family for any past history of disease, slavery, murder, theft, laziness, fraud or adultery. This investigation will be carried out more thoroughly on the girl's family, to find out the history of twins, early death of females in her family, rampant cases of divorce among the females, and finally, whether the girls' family is recognised in the society. The match is deemed fit or suitable when no record of the vices listed above is discovered in the historical background of any of the families.

According to Chief Ifere, The *Ƨεεpa* of Igwumale, after thorough investigations are carried out on the both families' historical backgrounds, and other private investigations on the part of the boy and the girl through each other's friends, the boy and his family will then, fix a day for the boy to formally introduce himself to the girl. This will take place in the girl's mother's room. The boy will come with his mother when the girl and her mother are seated in a room. Upon entering, the boy and his mother are welcomed, and given seats at the opposite direction of the girl and her mother. The boy's mother will say to the girl's mother, "I saw something in your house that is good, and I want to have it for my son". The girl's mother will then reply, "what is that thing"? The boy's mother answers, "Your beautiful daughter". This will be followed by a smile from the girl, with her face hidden behind her mother's back. The girl's mother will then say, "Let your son speak to the girl

herself'. The boy will then dip his hand in his pocket and bring out two kobo, (about one pence) and silently stretch his hand to the girl. If the girl wishes to marry the suitor and eventually stretches out her hand, accepts the two kobo from her suitor and passes it on to her own mother, then she has consented to the marriage.⁸⁷ On the other hand, if she refuses to accept the two kobo from the boy it means she did not accept or consent to marry her suitor, and that ends whatever process that had been set in motion sometimes before with regard to the marriage. This indicated that Idoma girls have the choice of who they want to marry. They did not just accept any man that is forced on them by their parents. If accepted the boy can from that moment send her gifts, but no physical contact or holding of hands is allowed.

The boy and his family will then formally introduce themselves to the girl's family by presenting a gourd of palm wine, local tobacco leaves, kolanut, bush meat, and potash to the girl's father in his home.⁸⁸ The girl's father by accepting these presents indicates his consent to the marriage between his daughter and the boy. He will then tell the boy of his intention to inform his extended relatives about the boy's visit to his home. Henceforth the boy pays regular visits to the girl. He can even sleep in the same room with the girl, provided he buys a mat.⁸⁹ But, if the boy attempts to have sexual relationship with the girl and the girl reports it to her mother, and it becomes publicly known, the consent that was given to the marriage is withdrawn. It is the generally belief that the boy is only interested in making love to the girl, thereby spoiling her virginity. This is very symbolic, as the girl's parents will later in the marriage find out

⁸⁷ Chief Ifere, The Idoma of Igwumale, *fieldwork* interview 29th August 1997.

⁸⁸ In the Idoma tradition, without this introduction, the boy would be regarded as a stranger to the father of the girl, which may create a serious set back in all that has been put in motion as far as the process of that particular marriage is concerned.

⁸⁹ This is not a general practice among the Idoma. It is unique mostly to the Agila people of Ado Local Government Area.

from the boy's parents if their daughter is a wife or not. What this means, is, if she was a virgin before meeting the husband or not. If the answer is positive, a cow is killed for her and she is given other gifts, but if the answer is negative, she is classified and looked at as a family disgrace, and some how treated as a second class wife in her husband's home.⁹⁰

During the period of the courtship, each year the boy organises communal farming for his prospective father-in-law when ever the latter is about to plant any crop. The boy's parent also visits the girl's family periodically with gifts of earrings, cloths, necklaces, soap, body cream etc. for the girl. The girl is never allowed to visit the boy in his house during the courtship. If she does, a gun is fired to signify that the girl is married to the boy and no bride price will be paid, and the boy would have his wife for free. During this period of courtship, various sacrifices are made for the girl to prepare her for a married life. Some parents will kill goats, rams or cows for their daughter depending on their means. The killing of these animals attracts special titles, for example, a girl for whom a cow is killed is *orinya*, and for whom many animals are killed is *oréw* 𐛁𐛂. These titles are very important, especially for women from Agila and Igwumale.

Some rituals accompany the killing of these animals. Before the animals are killed, the girl is brought before the eldest man in the village. The elder will then offer *εημε* - kolanut, and water libations to the spirits of the ancestors, saying some prayers or incantations as this is done. The animal will be made to drink this water that prayer is said into, this water will then be passed on to the girl who also will drink from the same vessel as the animal. This is to prevent this girl in her marriage life from the

⁹⁰ This stress on the girl's virginity before marriage is still currently emphasised in Id𐛁ma. However the slight unfairness in such emphasis is that such requirements are not made of the boys, which indicates inequality and unfairness on the part of the Id𐛁ma girls.

powers of any witch that will use animals or spirits of animals to harm her in her married life. The animal will be killed, shaved and eaten in the evening. The eldest man in the village will offer the head of the killed animal to the spirits of the ancestors, saying, *ayi' eb'enē i le kwu ayi' ɔɔɛ* - it is animal's head that is used as substitute for a human being. We have decided to be very detailed here, because of the implications that marriage ceremonies and practices had on missionary activities in Idoma, and its later implications for Idoma Christianity, which later chapters will highlight. After all these preliminary preparations, come the actual Idoma marriage ceremonies of paying the bride-price⁹¹

On the day that the bride price is to be paid, relatives and friends are invited to witness and support the paying of the bride-price. On this occasion, an elaborate feast is prepared by the girl's family, but funded by the boy's family. This feast includes pounded yam, bush meat with various other types of meat and fish, with melon seed or *ɔgbɔn* soup, drinks, *icanyi*, etc. After eating and drinking, selected elders from both families take their seats at opposite directions of each other, and begin to negotiate the bride price, through, the *Omi'kɔ* - an interpreter. There is no fixed bride-price in Idoma. The girl's father determines the final amount that is paid. This may be a very big amount or small amount depending on the character and behaviour of the potential son-in-law. For example, the bride price may be increased should the suitor be guilty of the following offences: (i) abandoning or deserting the girl for a period of three or more months; (ii) simulating sickness or illness to escape working

⁹¹ The observations below are based on the marriage ceremony of Abo and Abu of Opa Adoka in Otukpo Local Government, which I observed and participated in during my field work in Nigeria, 8th Sept. 1997, and other information gathered through interviews during the period of my field work in Idoma July-September 1997 and the information given by His Royal Highness the *ɔɔɛ Idoma*, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idoma during my translation work on the Idoma Bible.

for his father-in-law on his farm during farming seasons; (iii) sitting idle when his bride's parents are working in his presence or in the same house or environment, and (iv) showing any lack of respect for his bride's parents, especially the mother-in-law, as for instance, by throwing down firewood with a clatter near her house. The bride-price may be paid in part or full, on this day depending on the boy's means.

Traditionally, marriage ceremonies take place during the feasts of *Eje Alekwu*⁹² in *ɔgwa* or *ɔnɔ*,⁹³ during hunting seasons.

During the marriage ceremony, the girl is taken to the house of her father's relatives or hidden in her mother's room in the company of her close friends. When she is asked for, to come and collect the bride-price money for her parents, she is declared missing. Her close friend appears before the elders and offers to go and look for her, should the suitor pay her transport fares. The boy will proudly pay whatever amount this girl demands. She will then go to look for the girl, while the elders and all the participants at the occasion patiently wait for the appearance of the girl.

The bride, dressed up in glamorous and beautiful apparel, will slowly move, in the company of her friends, from where she was hidden in the midst of many other people, mostly, if not all, women, singing and dancing round the girl. On sighting the girl from a distance, the boy and all his friends, join in the dance with *ɔga*⁹⁴ and gunshots into the air. Amidst dancing, celebration and festivity, the bride and her maids are showered with gifts of money by the bridegroom, his relatives and friends

⁹² This is an ancestral feast that is celebrated annually between March and April. The Idoma people where possible would return to Idomaland to participate in this feast and celebrations.

⁹³ The former feast is during the raining seasons, while the latter is during dry season.

⁹⁴ *ɔga* is a traditional shout of joy performed by the women with one of their hand across their mouth, and the other raised to the back and the rest of the body dancing to the sounds of drums and other musical instruments such as uba, drum oke and ogalumpɛ-pipe or flute.

and also by the bride's relations and other well-wishers. When the rejoicing throng finally arrives at the scene of the marriage, the bride is taken to the elder who is the head of her family. She stands beautifully silent in front of the elder and all that is happening is explained to her, including the bride-price that is to be paid. She will then be asked a very important question. *ᵐdanᵐ ka je ka anᵐ ge we ɛnɛnɛ ɔnya le ɔba anᵐ, ɛnɛ anᵐ ga je uwueyi le ɛnɛ anᵐ mla ada nᵐ, mla acɛ ɔɛ anᵐ ɲ. Ai ka a kuw ije i ɲma ajɛ ka a kwuu gam.* - If you know that you will be an excellent wife to this man, and will not be a disgrace to your mother and father and the rest of the members of your family, then bend down and give me the money in front of you. The girl will then stoop low, take the money, and pass it on to the elder. This will be followed, with *ᵐga* and dancing, and the girl is showered with money by the bridegroom, his relatives and friends. This will be finally followed by some sacrifice to release the girl from whatever she was bound to prior to her getting married. Families that worship *Anjɛnu*, consult the oracle to know which of the spirits of her parents loves the girl. When they find out, they make a sacrifice to free the girl from being killed by that spirit when she marries. The spirit is thought to be jealous and needs to be appeased. Sacrifices are also made, to receive the blessings of the ancestors in her marriage. The girl will then be officially handed over publicly to the bridegroom's father, who will in turn give the girl to his son for a wife. The significance of this is, in *Idᵐma*, no matter how old you are, you are not matured nor will never have enough money to marry for yourself, but your father marries for you. Secondly, should there be future trouble and unhappiness in that marriage, the girl's parents complain to the bridegroom's father, and urge him to resolve whatever is causing the unhappiness in the marriage. Parental role is very important in marriages in *Idᵐma*.

Although the girl is officially handed over to the bridegroom, after the payment of the brideprice which could either be by the exchange of girls between families, by working for the father of the girl on his farm for a period of four to eight years, and by money⁹⁵ she is not allowed to go home with the boy that night. While she stays with her parents for the night, the boy goes back to his house to get his house ready for the arrival of his bride.

The bride in the evening of the following day arrives at her husband's home with the food stuffs, cooking utensils, enamelware, bed sheets, pots, cloths and every other thing that she will need in her husband's home bought for her by her parents. She will be accompanied on this trip by her few close friends and relatives, whom after eating the feast prepared for them by the bridegroom will return to their home that very night, and the couple will be left on their own for the first time.

In the light of our discussions so far, we would conclude this section by restating that, marriage in Idoma is not just between the couple, but the two families and related families and to some extent a community affair. Mothers are in most cases the determining factor in the Idoma marriage if that marriage is to continue or not. Idoma girls are given the choice of whom to marry. The marriage process among the Idoma involves good friendly relationships between the families. Parents and relatives of the

⁹⁵ R. G. Armstrong, *Idoma Speaking Peoples*, 1955, p.145 earlier, observes, that there are three ways of marrying in Idoma: (1) by exchange, when a girl of one family is exchanged for the girl of another family. On this occasion, the groom gives his bride five brass rods and her mother ten; (2) by dower, when on betrothal the suitor gives five brass rods to the girl, ten to her mother that she may buy salt, and thirty five to her father, five of which he is supposed to be spent on tobacco, ten on kolanuts, and twenty on acquiring the goodwill of his guardian spirit. Later on the suitor gives forty rods to his betrothed's mother and a hundred rods to her father, besides a gown or black cloth-Opa in their stead,

prospective couple conduct investigations into each other's family background for any history of disease, crime, and other bad conditions. The result of these investigations determines whether the intended marriage relationship between the partners is suitable or not. Bride-price will have to be paid either in part or full. This will be followed by a sacrifice either to *Anjenu*⁹⁶ or the Ancestors. After which the girl is finally taken to her husband's home.

2.5.3 Burial

Burial is a very important affair among the Idoma, due to the Idoma belief in reincarnation and life after death.⁹⁷ To the Idoma people, physical death is a mere transition from this earthly life to the next life and the world beyond.⁹⁸ The Idoma, therefore, always take proper care during burial ceremonies and rites, in order that nothing would be done in error and so prevent the smooth transition to the next life. There are, generally, four types of burial rites and ceremonies in Idoma. These are the burial of an infant, young people, adults, and an elder who is the head of the family and a chief. The kind of burial that is given to an Idoma person varies with the age or class status of that person. For example, is the person to be buried a chief or a commoner? Is that person rich or poor? Just like the *Alekwu Aboje* chanted in the *Alekwu* cultic chant

an additional twenty rods. (3) the third system is by labour, when a suitor works for his future father-in-law for a period of some eight years.

⁹⁶ This is a personal guardian angel.

⁹⁷ See the next chapter on the Idoma theology for discussions on the Idoma belief in reincarnation and life after death.

⁹⁸ Although, this chapter deals specifically with the Idoma people, it is however important to point out here that the Idoma belief about life after death may have similarities with other Nigerian, West African and possibly Other African Countries. For example, for a similar belief among the African people, see Jude Ongang'a, "The River-Lake Luo Phenomenon of Death: A Base for Religious Interaction" in *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, James L Cox (ed.), Cardiff, Cardiff Academic Press 1988.

<i>Eko nε olshá' gekwú,</i>	when a poor person dies
<i>ɔci agaòdō ge ka dā,</i>	the wooden bed will be sounding
<i>kplō kplō kplō</i>	<i>kplo klo klo</i> (this is Idoma ideophone)
<i>Aman h', Eko nε olɛɔdu gekwú,</i>	but when the rich person dies
<i>Uba I dē</i>	the drum will be sounding
<i>tīm̄m tīm̄m tīm̄m,</i> ⁹⁹	<i>tim̄m tim̄m tim̄m.</i>

In other words, the burial of the poor is dry and less festive and ceremonial, because there is nothing to eat and dance for. Rather all you hear is the noise or the rattling of his wooden bed that is being removed from his room by his heir. But the burial of the rich is very festive with a lot to eat, drink, dancing and celebration. Ordinary people are buried within twenty four hours of their death, but the rich, and the people of honour and influence are buried after a suitable funeral has been arranged, which may take two to three days and the later second and third burial ceremonies on the seventh and fourteenth days respectively. Our discussion will start with:

2.5.3.1 Burial of an Infant

In the Idoma tradition, the death of an infant is announced by the wailing of women when the child breathes its last.¹⁰⁰ Such a child is buried as quickly as possible in the bush.¹⁰¹ Infants under two years old are wrapped in banana leaves, and a kind of a leaf called *ɔwɔ* or *Ikikila* in Agila district. The banana leaves are first laid in the grave then corpse is placed on them, and covered by other banana leaves, then covered with the earth near the mother's hut or room. The significance of wrapping and burying an

⁹⁹ This is a transcription of the tape of Alekwu Abɔje, Chant, recorded during fieldwork in Otukpo in 1977. We cannot specifically date in detail this source, as Alekwu is a mystery especially in relation to women to whom the date and what is behind the Alekwu mask must be kept secret. The tape is with the present writer.

¹⁰⁰ This is still a current practice in among the Idoma people.

infant's corpse with banana leaves and burying it close to the mother's hut, in the Idoma traditional belief, is to ensure an early reincarnation, resulting in an early pregnancy of the mother soon after the infant's death. The corpses of children aged between two and five years are wrapped in a locally woven cloth called, *pa*, then buried.

In a case where a woman's children have always died in infancy, she is advised to maltreat the corpse of her latest dead child before burial. Such maltreatment is done to chase away the evil spirit believed to be continually reincarnating in her womb and dying. The corpse of the child is dragged around the compound, then lacerated with knife cuts before burial. This treatment of the infant's corpse is believed to forestall further reincarnation of the child that is not prepared to stay with the mother, but keeps coming and going.¹⁰² Later discussions in the next chapter will highlight the Idoma concept of reincarnation.

2.5.3.2 Burial of a Youth

Among the Idoma people the death of young a person is generally viewed as a very bad omen and disaster for the family and the entire community. The wailing for a young person is greater than the wailing for an elder, adult or infants. The death of a young person is announced in the southern parts of Idoma, such as Agila, Igwumale and Ulayi with many gun shots to alert the whole village that something very terrible

¹⁰¹ The reason why such infant is buried in the bush was, according to the traditional belief of the Idoma traditional people that, such an infant chose not to stay with the people by his death. Therefore, he or she had to go and live in the bush. He or she is therefore buried in the bush.

¹⁰² This is no longer a wide practice in most parts of Idoma today, but still practiced in some parts of Idoma, especially among the Agila in Ado Local Government Area.

has happened in the community.¹⁰³ On hearing the gun shots all the community begin to troop to the scene of the gun shots to find the cause. This is followed with much wailing by all that are present. A grave would be quickly prepared at the back of the family compound, and the young person is taken away for burial. He or she is buried without celebration.¹⁰⁴ He or she will be dressed in his or her best clothes, wrapped in *Ɔpa* - a traditionally woven cloth, and placed in the grave. The young ones who die of diseases like tuberculosis and leprosy are buried in the bush and no ceremony is performed, except that of calling home their spirit from the bush.¹⁰⁵ In present times, they will be buried in a coffin. When the Idoma began to bury their young ones in a coffin will be discussed in later chapter on Idoma Christianity today. Before the young persons are buried there is usually an *Ikpo dokwuoka*¹⁰⁶ - an inquest to determine the cause of the death before they are buried. This *ikpo dokwuoka* leads us to the next group of burials in Idoma where this features prominently.

2.5.3.3 Burial of Adults And Elders

In the Idoma tradition, when an adult dies in Idoma, messages are usually sent round, and all the elders are gathered. The corpse is dressed in his or her best outfit, and made to sit on *Ugada* - or *εε*¹⁰⁷ in Agatu area or lie on a mat on the floor with a plate on his chest. The women will sit round the corpse, some crying, especially the

¹⁰³ Otukpo Local Government Archives, OTKP/ AG/2/ Agila.

¹⁰⁴ In the Idoma tradition, bad omens are never celebrated, and since the death of young people are considered as bad omen and disaster for the community, their burial are never celebrated, but more painfully mourned.

¹⁰⁵ During fieldwork in Ocobo in July 1997, an elder of Ocobo, Ɔganyi who is believed to be the oldest man in Idoma today was asked, as to the reason why, young people who died of tuberculosis or leprosy are buried in the bush. He replied, Eko ku ikee aa, agwu we cda obiƆbi nehi, Ɔce ne o le agwu amann ka Ɔk, ipu aci ne o ge la aa, ipu aci we Ɔle nu aaa, Ɔle Ɔce ne e ke I nyi ƆƆ aa that is in the olden days, whoever had tuberculosis or leprosy, lived in the bush, the bush is his or her home, and it is in somebody's home that you would bury that person. He is right, by starting his answer from eko ku ikee aa- in the Olden days, because this is no longer a current practice in Idoma.

¹⁰⁶ See the later discussions on *ikpoelaokwu oka* for further details

immediate families, and those closely associated with the corpse. All the elders gather at *Ɔpu* - the community assembly ground and the burial ceremony will begin with *ikpó'ɔ̀aɔ̀kwuɔ̀oka*¹⁰⁸ -an inquest. We will be very detailed here in our discussion, due to the role *ikpó'ɔ̀aɔ̀kwuɔ̀oka* plays in Idoma Christianity, and for its metaphysical, philosophical and theological implications for both the Idoma people and Idoma Christianity.

Ikpó'ɔ̀aɔ̀kwuɔ̀oka may be defined as “group discussions by the delegates of paternal and matrilineal representatives of the family of the dead person as to the reason for his or her death”¹⁰⁹. The tracing of the cause of death, and also providing the answers to the cause of the death, and the prevention of such similar deaths in the future, and the imposition of the appropriate judgement, penalty or fine on whoever is judged to be the cause of the death. As Armstrong rightly stated, inquest in Idoma literally means, “talking about the cause of death..., a talk about the matter of the corpse”¹¹⁰

We must bear in mind that in order to fully understand the Idoma *ikpoɔ̀aokwuooka*, one has to be aware of the religious, phenomenological, metaphysical and philosophical factors that are central to any discussions on Idoma *ikpó'ɔ̀aɔ̀kwuɔ̀oka*¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁷ These are traditional wooden chair and a clay pot.

¹⁰⁸ For detailed descriptions of *Ikpó'ɔ̀aɔ̀kwuɔ̀oka*, an Idoma inquest, see Samson O. O. Amali. *An Ancient Nigerian Drama: The Idoma Inquest A Bilingual Presentation in Idoma and English Together with Odegwudegwu An Original Bilingual Play in Idoma and English*, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH Stuttgart, 1985.

¹⁰⁹ His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idoma, Bible translation Fieldwork interview, May, 1986.

¹¹⁰ See R. G. Armstrong, “West African Inquest” *American Anthropology*, Vol.56 no 6, p.1051; see also “The Idoma Court linages” 1959.

Ikpoɔdaokwuooka is very central to the Idoma people, because it enables the Idoma to discover the cause of death within their community. It also provides them with ways of handling the problems that are associated with death, e.g., witchcraft. As Amali rightly pointed out,

Inquest performances are public dramatisations of societal and individual grief. These public performances restore a sense of health to the society and the individual. They also reprimand and punish those who are presumed to have been responsible for the death of a person. They serve as deterrents to individuals within the society who may plan to harm their fellow men. An inquest may be used as a means of enforcing a social sanction.... The performances of inquest depict death as a transition between two lives, temporal and spiritual. They also demonstrate that life and death are stages of cosmic process, that is of an infinite cycle.¹¹²

In Idoma, it is generally believed that death is in most cases, if not always, caused by external forces or agents, such as witches or poisoning agents, which can be human, animal or metaphysical. This is still a current passionate belief in Idoma, despite their current scientific knowledge as to why deaths may occur

In the Idoma *ikpoɔdaokwuooka*, although the ritual ceremonies are held for every Idoma indigenous adult, inquest on the death of the elders are in most cases more detailed than of a young person whose death is always classified as a misfortune for the family and the community. As a result, at his or her death, an oracle is consulted through *ɛbaanwa*¹¹³ - this is the material that is used to consult the ancestors, other divinities and spirits to determine the cause of the death of a young person. When this

¹¹¹ See next discussion in chapter three on Idoma theology.

¹¹² Samson O. O Amali, *An Ancient Nigerian Drama*, 1985, p. 17.

¹¹³ *ɛbaanwa* is a divination act that is currently practised in Idoma, in consulting the ancestors, and the spirits, in ascertaining their minds and views on matters of great importance to the Idoma people. The Idoma response to a given situation in most cases is determined through this practice of *ɛbaanwa*.

is done, and the cause of the death is known, the community elders ask either the parents or whoever is judged to be responsible for the death of the young person to make the required sacrifices, and other reparations so as to prevent future occurrence of such death in the community.

But in the event of the death of an older person, the *Ikpoelaokwuoka* may follow more complex procedures¹¹⁴ as stated below:

1. When there is death in one of the families, the elder of that family who will be the most senior man will send a very formal message to the most senior elder in his sublineage saying: *ɔyi um Abu aman η ka Ada gekwu* - my child Abu or Ada has died.
2. *Opo le egba dē aman η egbe le e lā ka-* A horn-call, gun shot and wailing cry officially announces the death.
3. The head of the sublineage on his part sends a message to the head of his principal lineage, saying, *ɔyi um, Abu, aman η ka Ada gekwu* - my child Abu or Ada has died.
4. The head of the principal lineage sends in turn a message to the other two or more principal lineages, and they in turn will inform their sublineages about the occurrence of the death.
5. All the members of the deceased families both paternal and maternal will be informed, and the deceased's friends of the same age group or peers and all the

¹¹⁴ The procedures that are described here are based on the general Idoma procedure of *Ikpoelaokwuoka*, and on my eye witness observation and active participation during fieldwork in Adoka in the *ikpoelaokwuoka* of Chief Omaji ece, the *ɔdeɔ* of Adoka on the 26th July 1997.

members of any associations he belonged to will be notified of his or her death.

6. On the following day, at about noon time, elders, families, family friends and spectators will assemble at $\mathcal{D}pu$ - an open arena for the *ikpoḍaookwuooka*.
7. When all the required elders and persons are present, then the *ikpóḍaōkwūōoka* inquest begins with the following happening simultaneously:
 - (a) The dead body will be dressed and laid on a raised platform in *Itakpa* - the reception hall surrounded by gifts of clothes, money from his family and friends, and other things he or she may need in the world beyond. In Idoma North, the corpse is bathed and a white traditional hand-woven cloth is used to wrap the body and head, leaving only the face open. The corpse is then seated on a chair clothed in a flowing gown covering the corpse and the chair leaving only the head to be seen. A calabash plate is placed on the chest. People, one after the other, will come, say few things about the dead and some may send messages to their dead father or mother to remember them, and they will then drop some money into the calabash plate on the deceased's chest. In Adoka, the dead body is made to sit outside on a pot with his back resting on his ancestral sacred tree - $\mathcal{D}la\mathcal{D}w\mathcal{D}$, where he worshipped his ancestors. One of the senior elders gives thanks to the ancestors for the life of the deceased and those who need to communicate with their dead ones are given the chance to tell the corpse their messages for their relatives in the world of the dead. A message he or she must surely deliver in the world of the dead.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ The Idoma world of the dead will be discussed in the next chapter on the Idoma theology.

- (b) About twenty women will form a circle in front of the deceased, dancing and singing with their hands around each other's waist.¹¹⁶
- (c) While they are dancing, they will be singing farewell songs to wish the deceased a safe journey to his eternal home, and songs that will carry a message of comfort and sympathy for the family, and songs that bear messages to their own loved ones that have gone before.
- (d) When this *uculo*-ritual is going on, a masquerade called *Owunāekwū*¹¹⁷ comes into the compound where the dead body is lying and listening to his inquest and farewell songs and the messages he or she was being given for the others who had departed before. *Owunekwu* dance to a lone flute. The music from the flute will instruct *Owunekwu* to act or be still or flog people with the exception of the $\supset\subset\epsilon$ - king and the *anyakwu* $\supset\subset\epsilon$ - elders, thereby reducing all the people present at the occasion to the same level.

¹¹⁶ The song and the dancing is called *Icica*, which would be led by an elderly woman who traditionally reached a male status in the *Idoma* tradition, that she has passed the age of menopause, and has been regarded as a man by the community. The writer has a copy of the only *Icica* record ever produced, by the Late Professor R.G. Armstrong.

¹¹⁷ As Samson O. O Amali, *An Ancient Nigerian Drama*, 1985, p. 21 rightly observes, *Owunāekwū* is very unpredictable, at one moment he will be calm, at the next he will become very wild. Once his musical flute begins to sound, he will remain still in one spot standing on one leg, then he will utter ferocious sounds, warning that he will attack. He then spins around on the spot on one leg, gradually gathering momentum, and finally charging wildly with full speed at the audience at the inquest. At the peak of his violent act, the community believes that spiritual forces had completely possessed him, and that he had reached the highest level of transformation, union and fusion with the spiritual forces that are represented. He is believed at such moments to be in complete oneness with the forces. Although his blows are very painful, none is allowed to attack *Owunāekwū* back, as his actions are carried out in obedience to the spiritual forces. *Owunāekwu* also functions to reduce all men to the same level by meting equal treatment to each through flogging. He has the right to flog any one present at the inquest with the exception of the elders and chiefs. The masker of *Owunāekwū* will be known in the society, but during the performance at inquests his human and personal identity was totally lost to the spirit that he represented. He becomes the spirit himself.

8. The inquest formally begins with:

- a) a call to silence *ÉÉÉÉÉÉYI a ma uya éé'oooo!*
- b) traditional salutations to all the participants *Ocobo -Agbó,*
Otukpó ɔdu, Ugboju ɔbāndē,
Ādōkà Alégwū etc.
- c) The host lineage's first formal questioning of the deceased's family *A le tutū éééé?* Are you Ready?
- d) The paternal family of the deceased's first response to the host's question, *II, Ai ka le enyi gwa' éé!* Yes, but have some drink first.
 He will then present pots of guinea-corn beer to the participants. The partaking of the drinks not only satisfies the physical thirst, but symbolically acts as a ritual communion of the Idɔma Ipuɔma and people with itself and the dead.
- e) The host lineage accepts the drink. When he accepts the drink, he will then present it to the guest lineages.
- f) The guest lineage accepts the drinks, and then presents it to each person in order of seniority and traditional protocol, and shares the drinks among all the participants.
- g) The paternal family of the deceased will be questioned a second time:
ɔdi' ya' éé'nē a kē Why has the paternal family of the

hi ójila igwú I bá ajé aa? deceased assembled
 representatives of the various
 Ipuᵐma?

- h) He will respond to this vital second question by stating that:

ᵐyi alᵐkwú a n̄ it was our child that died.

- i) The paternal family of the deceased will be questioned further on the steps he had taken to prevent this death:

ᵐdi n̄é a yá éé, n̄é ifam nyā What have you done to prevent
kē h̄é alᵐaa? Abᵐa yá l̄é this death? What steps have you
ne enyi nyā je fiā akpa ᵐfú aa taken before the river
 overcomes bridge?

- j) The paternal family of the deceased will respond by stating all the steps he had taken to prevent this death, and what eventually led to the death of the deceased, and puts the responsibility of the death on the third party, in most cases the maternal family or a witch, or any other external forces.

- k) The third party will be called to defend himself or herself.

- l) The defence of the third party

- m) The whole matter is further pushed to the guest lineages for further examination and final verdict as to what was responsible for the death of the deceased.

- n) The guest lineages will then speak according to the order of seniority.

- o) The lineage participants will repeat and summarise all the various speeches, and adding his own view.

- p) The guest lineages will then provide the final verdict that consists of the following:
1. Expression of sympathy to the family and the community
 2. The delivery of the verdict, which consists of appropriate measures to be taken against those accused of being responsible for the death, and taking the problems associated with death to *Ohḍḡgáci* the divine patron of death for the final solution.
 - 3 The ordering of *Idḡma* burial cloth *ḡpa*. This will be brought forward, seen, measured, and accepted.
 4. The ordering of the gift giving ceremony to commence. This may include clothes, money and the ram to be slaughtered on the grave in order to ensure the deceased smooth journey to the spiritual world, and his safe return to earth when he will be recreated as an ancestor.

5. Finally, the ordering of the last rites for the burial of the dead to begin. These last rites are very important as they finally open the way into the spirit world¹¹⁸ for the dead.¹¹⁹

After this elaborate inquest that may take between four to five hours, then the actual burial will take place. We have decided to be very detailed in our discussion of the Idoma *ikpóḍāōkwūōoka*-an inquest followed by burial, because of the later significant role it played in Idoma Christianity.¹²⁰

After the *ikpóḍāōkwūōoka*, the corpse will be dressed with his best clothes and other clothes that he was given at the inquest with the gift of money and the gifts, wrapped in *ṣpa*-the Idoma burial cloth, placed in a traditional coffin called *akplata*, unless he is the most senior elder or chief, then placed in the grave. The person to start filling the grave picks up some earth with his hoe, passes it under his thigh three times and places it at the side of the head of the corpse, and does the same at the side of his or her foot. All others will after him pick up some earth and pour it on the corpse. This symbolises farewell in Idoma. Males are laid to rest facing the east, symbolically reminding them to rise early at sunrise to go to their farm in the world of the dead.

¹¹⁸ The spiritual world of the dead in Idoma is believed to consist of the following: (1) The reception at the gate to the world of the spirit of the dead for the newly arrived from the human world. (2) The cleansing of the face of the new spirit from the human world with certain potent liquid medicine by the spirits in the world of the dead. (3) merriments, dancing singing by the spirits of the world of the dead for the new arrival from human world (4) and finally the questioning of the new spirit from the human world, about the conditions of the human beings he or she has left behind, and any other messages he or she must have been given for those in the world of the dead.

¹¹⁹ The discussions in numbers 1-8, and the sub points are mostly taken from Samson O. O. Amali, *Ancient Nigerian Drama*, 1985, p. 18-28.

¹²⁰ See later discussion in Chapter seven.

Women are laid to rest facing the west, to remind them to return home at sunset to cook the night meal in the world of the dead.

Masqueraders will normally be present or be in attendance at the burial to represent the spirits of the ancestors, coming to welcome the spirit of the deceased to the abode of the ancestors. The masquerade sing seven different songs, and the corpse is covered after the last song.

The head of the family is never buried outside the family compound, but in the compound at a site where his tomb will be protected and sheltered from the rain. Elderly women who are classified as male in the community, are charged with the responsibility of watching over the corpse of an elderly person before the burial. During this time of watching the corpse, they continually play *icica* - some rattles, and *icica* songs. They are rewarded with money and drinks for doing this. Some sacrifices will be made to *icica* as well. For example, if the deceased is an old woman, a fowl is used to make a sacrifice to the *icica* - rattles that are played for the corpse. The head of the fowl is buried with the corpse, while the women who played the *icica* eat the rest of the fowl. For an old man, a goat is used. The goat will be killed with a single stroke of a knife, skinned with an opening on the skin, the flesh cut up in pieces and put back into the skin through the mouth. This is then buried with the corpse.¹²¹

Those who take part in the burial or witness it, will pick a leaf, move it round their heads three times and then touch their bodies with it. Simultaneously, they request the departed not to hurt them as they know nothing about his or her death. They also ask

the departed to protect them, and leave the leaf on the grave. In the Idoma north, they will put *ƆciƆdu* a stick on the grave, which is only removed on the seventh day in the presence of the man who inherits the deceased's property. A tortoise, a symbol of peaceful journey in Idoma will be killed and a cock, and their blood, with ground millet and wine, plus the liver of the tortoise are placed on the grave and the stick removed. The brother of the deceased will then make the *ohébi* sacrifice to the spirit of his brother and the ancestors before he can touch the property of the deceased. Failure to do so will result in the anger of the deceased being kindled against him, which may result in his death or a very bad disease such as leprosy. Burial is very significant to the Idoma people, because of the Idoma belief in life after death and reincarnation. It is passionately believed throughout Idomaland that physical death is only a mere transition from one stage of life to another. Care, therefore, must be taken to bury a person properly and to avoid breaking any of the taboos or burial rites.

2.5.3.4 The Burial of ƆƆa Chief

In the Idoma tradition, when a chief dies, it is not disclosed publicly, except to the relations and the most senior elders of the community for a period of three months. This disclosure to the relatives and the most senior elders will be done in figures of speech or adages, such as:

<i>Ágábá le tá ipú upū</i>	The Lion has gone to the forest or
<i>ƆƆé le piya Ágábá</i> ¹²²	The Chief has become a Lion

It will then be officially claimed that the Chief is unwell and has gone to another town for treatment or that he has travelled. During this period of public silence, his corpse

¹²¹ This is still a current practice among the Idoma people, especially among the Otukpo, Ocobo, Ugboju and Oglewu clans.

will be buried in the bush in a place called, *ukwulukwu* - the burial place for Chiefs, or he will be buried inside his house.¹²³

During the burial of a chief, in addition to various other rituals and sacrifices, it is customary to kill and bury two slaves with the chief, one as a pillow for the chief's head and the other as a resting place for his feet. Or, their two legs will be broken, with one sitting at the late chief's head, while the other at his feet. They will eventually be buried alive with the chief. It is believed that those two slaves will help the chief in carrying the chief's belongings to the world of the dead and his ancestral home. The chief's youngest wife may be buried alive with him in order for the chief to have a wife in the world beyond¹²³.

We have observed in this chapter the Idoma identity and suggested that this group of people living on a strip of land that stretches from the southern bank of the river Benue to the northern fringes of the Igbo land, numbered over one and half million people. They have common tradition that recognises Apa as their ancestral homeland, whence they migrated due to a prolonged chieftancy dispute and the *efu'anya* - horse war with the Hausa Fulanis. Dr Erim's erroneous view of Idu as the putative father of what he called "the original Idoma" was rejected on the grounds that his argument was not based on the Idoma context, but on early colonial anthropologists who collected the so called Idoma genealogies. Secondly, of the twenty two Idoma districts, it is only in Ugboju, Adoka and Otukpo that claim descent from Idu. And finally, there is no oral evidence in the other nineteen districts of Idoma that supports

¹²² Such pronunciation would normally come from the Achadu who is the royal undertaker and the king maker.

¹²³ The later is mostly practised in the southern part of Idoma among the Agila, Ulayi and the Igwumale in Ado Local Government area.

Erim's Idu putative father theory of the Idoma people. We then went on to examine the *Alekwū Ab-jēj* cultic chant to establish the Idoma pre colonial identity and origin and concluded that the Idoma came from Apa in the defunct Kwararafa Jukun Kingdom and settled at different periods in history to the present day Idoma land. This was followed with the examination of some Idoma social organisations, political systems, economy, agriculture, and three aspects of the Idoma culture: birth, marriage, and burial that have direct bearing and very significant roles to play in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

Let us now turn our attention to some religious, metaphysical and philosophical factors central to our discussion on the Idoma interaction with Christianity in the next chapter on the Idoma primal theology.

¹²³ Although it is against the law to openly do this today in Idoma, but in reality it is still being practised secretly.

CHAPTER THREE

IDOMA PRIMAL THEOLOGY

In presenting this chapter we will be using the writer's observation from fieldwork in Idoma July-September 1997, and his personal indigenous experience of Idoma and the Idoma system¹ to present our discussion on the Idoma primal² theology, though slightly influenced by Christianity. How have the Idoma been articulating God, creation, life after death, etc., before they made any contact with Christianity? Since theology could be defined as an intellectual articulation of God, creation, the supernatural or the supersensible, one is bound to ask, how does Idoma intellectually articulate God and the supernatural, creation, this world, and the world beyond? Is there any unique Idoma way of articulating theology?

We investigate in this chapter if God was present in the Idoma world view, religious beliefs and practices, arts and music, epistemology before the Idoma ever made contact with Christianity. Basing our proposition on the universal Supreme God who *is ma iyinufu*-self revealed in works and words in Idoma, we will critically examine the epistemological avenues of the Idoma people and hopefully come to the evaluation that the Idoma believe and worship the same one supreme God as any one else in the world.

¹ We had to rely upon fieldwork observation and our Idoma experience, and the oral evidence in our discussion, due to the scarcity of written material, that is if there is any at all on the Idoma primal theology.

² Scholars in relation to African theology had earlier used the term "primal" for the indigenous beliefs of a given people. See for an example Andrew Walls, 1987 "Primal Religious Traditions in Today's World", in F Whaling (ed.), *Religion in Today's World*, 76-109, Edinburgh. See also Baylis. P 1988, *An Introduction to Primal Religions*, Edinburgh; J. E. Brown, 1984, "Religion in Primal Societies, North American Indian Religion" in J. Hinnel, (ed.), *A Handbook of Living Religion*, PP.392, 412, Penguin Books; James L. Cox. 1992, *Expressing The Sacred*, Zimbabwe Publication; Mitchell R.C 1977, *African Primal Religion*, Illinois, Argus communication; Taylor J V 1963, *The Primal Vision*, SCM Press.

We will also examine the Idoma response to that one and the same supreme God in their acts of worship and rituals before they made contact with Christianity.

We will define what is meant by Idoma primal theology. It is however important to point out at this stage that the Idoma primal theology is by no means to be regarded as mutually exclusive of African theology of which a lot had already been written³ and defined⁴ by various scholars. However for the purpose of our studies, we would focus primarily on the Idoma people. But such focus does not preclude us from making reference to African theology in general or the writers on African theology when necessary.

3.1. Idoma Theology: Definition

By Idoma theology, we mean an interpretation and translation of God's revelation and self-disclosure in a given context in which the Idoma find contact with mythology, ethics, worship and rituals of primal religion, beliefs and practices. It is an interpretation of God in terms that are relevant and essential to Idoma existence within their context.

³ See for example, E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, SCM Press, 1973; John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, Eerdmans Publishing House, 1995; Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation*, London, Geoffrey Chapman 1976; K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second and Modern Africa*, Oxford, Regnum Books, 1992; J. K. Agbeti, "African Theology: What is it?" in *Presence*, Vol.5, no. 3, 1972.

⁴ For example, Raimo Harjula a Finnish missionary defines African Theology as an interpretation of God's self-revelation in a given context which in Africa situation finds contact with mythology, ethics and rituals of traditional African. Whereas Idowu, in his book *African Traditional Religion*, argues that African theology should emerge at a point in which Christianity meets with African Traditional Religion, others such as Agbeti felt, when we talk about African theology, we should mean the interpretation of the pre-Christian and pre-Muslim African people's experience of God. In his chapter on the question of identity as a key to understanding the concerns of theology in modern Africa in the second century AD. Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 3 agrees with the earlier position of Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity*, p. 50 that African theology should be seen 'as a dialogue between the African... scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa'.

The Idoma context as observed by Bediako in relation to Africa as a whole in his book *Theology and Identity*, “has to do with the possibility of genuine theology, which seeks a synthesis between... religious commitment and cultural continuity”.⁵ Idoma primal theology could also be defined as the interpretation of the pre-Christian Idoma experiences of God. It is the primal articulation of the *ɔwɔico*⁶ in Idoma, and the Idoma religious beliefs and practices prevalent before the arrival of Christianity in Idoma. This is the tangible and felt practical relationship with what is believed in the Idoma traditional religion as supernatural power. Idoma theology is the primal indigenous articulation of God in Idoma. It is that theology that has been traditionally handed down from generation to generation by the Idoma forebearers to the present generation of Idoma.⁷ This Idoma primal theology is not a thing of the past, but a theology that the Idoma today have as their own by living it and practising it in their daily lives.

Cox argues that, the choice of the term primal:

was motivated in part by the desire to avoid injecting pejorative attitudes into the study of certain types of religion as phenomena, thereby overcoming descriptive biases.⁸

The term “primal” is however used here to mean something that is real, original, inborn and inherent in the Idoma articulation and response to *ɔwɔico* - God, resulting in what we call Idoma theology. We mean the Idoma first-truth inherent in their language,

⁵ K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 432.

⁶ *ɔwɔico* is the Idoma word for the supreme God. See later discussion for details of *ɔwɔico*.

⁷ The conveyance of the Idoma theology from one generation to another was through oral transmission.

⁸ James, L. Cox, The classification ‘Primal Religion’ as A Non-Empirical Christian theological Construct, in *Studies in World Christianity*, 2 (1) 1996, p. 56.

culture, and concrete historical experiences in their primal articulation of ɔwɔico, creation; the Idoma worldview, divinities, life after death; reincarnation, worship and sacrifice. Using the term “primal” in relation to the Idoma theology is completely in agreement with John B. Taylor’s suggestion when he rightly states that, the term primal could be regarded as something “basic or fundamental that is observed in societies or religion”.⁹

One of the greatest critics of the terminology, “primal”, Dr. Cox, even consents to the use of this term, when it is been used in relation to theology. He correctly agrees, “ this is a valuable terminology for theology”.¹⁰ Mitchell defines the word primal as meaning, “something basic, fundamental, prior.”.¹¹ In his own definition cited by Shaw, Harold Tuner defines the term “primal” as “both primary and prior; they represent a common religious heritage of humanity”.¹² Walls on his part states that, it is that, which “underlies all the other faiths, and often exists in symbiosis with them...and have an active life within and around cultures and communities influenced by these faiths...”¹³ therefore possessing “historical anteriority” and represents a “basic elemental status in human experience”.¹⁴ Using this word in relation to Idoma theology therefore, we mean that Idoma religious experiences beliefs and practices which are prior, basic and fundamental to the Idoma people, that exist within the Idoma “symbiosis”, with active

⁹ J. B. Taylor, (ed.), *Primal World View: Christian Dialogue With Traditional Thought Form*, Ibadan, Daystar Press, 1976, p. 3.

¹⁰ James L Cox, *Classification of Primal Religion*, p. 13.

¹¹ R. C. Mitchell, *African Primal Religions*, Niles Illinois, Argus Communications, 1977, p. 98.

¹² H. W. Turner, *Living Tribal Religions*, London, 1971.

¹³ A. F. Walls, “The Christian Tradition in Today’s World”, in F. Whaling (ed.), *Religion in Today’s World*, Edinburgh, 1987, P. 250.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

life within the Idoma culture and tradition. Idoma primal theology is that which, while practically active in Idoma, has its own unique Idoma context and beyond, tolerant of Christianity and other religions, possesses its sources in the Idoma history, language, culture, arts and music, and has basic creeds and beliefs that are passed on from one generation to another. It could be suggested that the Idoma children are born into the Idoma primal theology.

Theology, as Walls rightly argues, "...springs out of practical situations, it is therefore occasional and local in character".¹⁵ It holds therefore, that any valuable discussion of the Idoma theology must take Idoma context, situations and locality into serious consideration. Principal to our discussion in this line, are the Idoma epistemology, language and religious experiences. Examining these closely, we discover that Idoma primal theology has the following basic structures:

3.2. THE Knowledge of *Ṣwɔɔ* – God

What we are contending here, is that *Ṣwɔɔ*-God to the Idoma is an existential reality and not just a philosophical abstract concept.¹⁶ We are totally in agreement here with Marshall MacLuhan, who argues that God dies the moment he becomes a concept¹⁷. To the Idoma, *Ṣwɔɔ* is not a concept, but a reality that they knew, thought of, and spoke

¹⁵ A. F. Walls, "The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", *Missionalia*, 10 (3), 1982, p. 100. 1

¹⁶ The words concept or conception are philosophical terms which are inadequate to describe the religious consciousness of the Idoma. As a term it applies to a general idea derived from senses. The natural process by which such an idea is obtained is called abstraction. However, it must be pointed out here that we do not mean that the Idoma are less philosophical than the westerners or any other race of the world.

of prior to their contact with Christianity. The Idoma, as our earlier discussion had pointed out, have a local indigenous name for God. They called God *Ṣwɔico*. The Idoma people traditionally believe there is a real *Ṣwɔico* who is *ma iyinu fu* self-revealed in his *ukul* works. It is not for them to prove *Ṣwɔico*'s existence, but rather demonstrate their comprehension of the revealed *Ṣwɔico* and their ritual response to him. As the Idoma express it in their *ita*¹⁸ *Ṣe duuma i nwu Ṣyipe, Ṣene Ṣwɔico we a ṇma* - no one teaches a child who God is. This implies among the Idoma that the knowledge of God is inherent and primal to the Idoma, so much so that even a child can understand whom God is. The existence of God is *ta eyi peeee* immanence and self-evident with the Idoma. For example, Mr Ogbe was asked during fieldwork in Iga Okpaya, Aba je ka *Ṣwɔico ico yɔ* le aa how do you know that there is God?

He replied,	Ma um	see me
	N yɔ	do I exist?
	Ḍdan' ka n yɔ	if I exist
	ai ka <i>Ṣwɔico yɔ</i>	then God exists
	ḌḌān' ka <i>Ṣwɔico I yɔ</i> ḥ	Because, if God does not exist
	ḥ n kē yɔ ḥ duu' ¹⁹	then I can't exist

¹⁷ For further details of this argument, see as cited by F.B. Welbourn in his review of Mbiti's book, *Concepts of God in Africa*, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 4, (1972), 227.

¹⁸ Ita is the Idoma idiomatic and proverbial sayings

¹⁹ Mr. Ogbe, Fieldwork interview, Iga Okpaya, 27th July 1977. Mr. Ogbe who is 72 years old is one of the first generation Christians from *Ḍekwu* in the northern part of Idoma. He is the senior circuit steward of Iga Okpaya Circuit, a post he has held for over 30 years now. Although the constitution of the Methodist Church Nigeria makes provision for this office to be rotated every five years, the Iga circuit decided that Mr Ogbe must hold this office as long as he wished. This stand they took, though in disobedience to the Constitution of the Methodist church, was due to what they called, "the transparent honesty and integrity" of Mr. Ogbe as their leader. This man's Christian integrity is not limited to Iga only, but throughout the Diocese of Benue and beyond to other parts of the country such as Jos, Kaduna, Zaria and Kano.

This is perceived through the very Idoma existence. They express this as follows *ega duuma nɛ oyɔeyi yɔ aa ɔwiɔɔ yɔ abɔ* wherever there is life, there is God. To the Idoma therefore, the very existence of life, demonstrates the existence of God's reality to them.

The Idoma generally believe in the existence of a supreme being called *ɔwɔɔ*.

ɔwɔɔ is a compound Idoma word that can be broken as follows: *ɔwɔ* - meaning, 'Lord, owner, the source being who is supreme' and *ico* meaning 'up'. Putting the two together, *ɔwɔɔ* in Idoma means 'the Source being who lives above' or 'the Lord' or 'my owner' *ɔwɔum*, who is above. Is this a case of another African "high God" who is removed from the day to day life of the people as argued by various scholars?²⁰ To the Idoma, even though *ɔwɔɔ* is high-*yɔico*, He is not removed from the day today life of all the Idoma people. He is always present and active in their lives and context.²¹ To them, *ɔwɔɔ* is one who is supreme, "superlatively great, incomparable and unsurpassable in majesty, excellent in attributes, stable, unchanging, constant and

²⁰ See for example, F Baudin, *Fetishism and Fetish Worshippers*, 1855, p. 9ff, Diedrich Westermann, *Africa and Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 1973, especially p. 65 ff.; Rattray, *Ashanti*, 1923, p. 139 ff.; Margaret, *The Ngoni of Nyasaland*, Oxford University Press, 1957, especially, p. 158, where she argued that the "Ngoni undoubtedly had the idea of a creator, removed and unapproachable by man". To all of these scholars, the God of the Africans, is a high, removed, unapproachable, idle sleeping God that has nothing to do or without any active part in the day to day lives of the Africans. African theologians like Idowu, in his book, *African Traditional Religion: A definition*, 1973, SCM Press, had given some adequate reply to these erroneous views about 'the African God'. However, we would point out here that, most of these writers did their writing at a time when probably, they had little access to the proper source of African belief and practices, or when they had little more than a chance opportunity of a fleeting glimpse of the vast continent of Africa. Those who have looked more carefully into the African primal religion and the African context, would easily agree today that the sweeping statement of the 'African High God' that is removed from the day today life of the African cannot now be taken seriously, either by the Africans or an objective scholarly minded non-African investigator.

²¹ See later discussion on the presence of *ɔwɔɔ* among the Idoma people.

realistic”²². Besides the name *Ɔwɔɔɔ*, Idoma is very rich in *icɔɔgba* - attributes of God which clearly demonstrate that to them that God is a living one, “who is an ever present, ever active, and ever acting reality in the world”.²³

This *Ɔwɔɔɔ* expresses himself in his *icɔɔgba* - attributes among the Idoma. By the attributes of God in Idoma, we mean the quality or the characteristics of God to the Idoma people. These are the properties of *Ɔwɔɔɔ* as are visibly exercised by him in his works of creation, preservation and providence which are preserved in the Idoma traditions, language and culture. As Danquah correctly states

Man is so utterly limited, he cannot think of the ultimate Reality, but in metaphors, drawn from the ordinary concrete things of common experience²⁴

Idowu’s observation on the Yorubas of Nigeria is also applicable to the Idoma, when he said,

The Yoruba do little abstract thinking. Their picture of Olodumare is therefore of a personage, venerable and majestic, age(sic) but not ageing with greyness which commands awe and reverence²⁵

Instead of the usual practice of imposing western theological categories of Christianity and concepts of God on the Idoma tradition, we will let the Idoma speak for themselves. Let us further examine through the Idoma language, culture and history what they say about God.

²² E. B. Idowu, *African Religion*, p. 36.

²³ Ibid., p. 150

²⁴ see Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 129-130.

In all of God's major *aicɔɔgba*-attributes as we observe among the Idoma perception, God's sovereignty will be the right summary of Idoma articulation and knowledge of God. They see God as sovereign in *ɛɛ* - the world with respect to his creatures; nature and to *ɔwɔɔ*'s person. Prior to the Idoma making contact with Christianity, they expressed the cosmic sovereignty of God as *anú ɛ̃ñ ɔ ogoɡa kla n̄wun̄e f̄iȳe' d̄uu*. God who is sovereign in the entire universe. The Idoma in their tradition do not compartmentalise the created universe, but refer to and believe the natural and spiritual world as two sides of the same and one coin and over this *ɔwɔɔ wɛ otul̄ ɛ̄ye' ku nu aa*, God is supreme and sovereign.²⁶ God's sovereignty and supremacy in terms of his power is perceived in Idoma both in creation and control and demonstrated in their address to God especially at the time of prayer *Anú ɛ̃ñ ɔ ya' ɛɛ aa, ke I l̄ɛ ɔd̄ā innū tū gl̄ā aa*, He who makes the world controls and sustains it.²⁷

ɔwɔɔ is the absolute controller of the universe. And this is the main focal point at which that fact of the reality of his uniqueness in the Idoma concept may clearly be brought home to us. The fact that *ɔwɔɔ* controls the universe embraces all that we have been trying to say, and shows the western theological falsity of the notion of the

²⁵ see Idowu, *Olodumare* God in Yoruba Belief, p. 39.

²⁶ See Okwu V. C, "Early History of Idomaland", Ahmodu Bello University, Seminar, 1974.

²⁷ This prayer was offered by Mrs. C. O Carew, a 67 year old and the President of women's fellowship of the Methodist Church, Benue Diocese, during fieldwork in Otukpo on the 3rd August 1997 at morning worship prayer, Norcross Church Otukpo. The same prayer was heard in eight other places of worship in Idoma during field work in Otukpo, Orokam, Iga, Adoka, Ugboju, Umogidi, Iwili, Owukpa and Onyagede. This particular prayer became almost like a collect in which the Idoma acknowledge God who is the creator and absolute preserver of the world.

“withdrawn God” in Africa, of which Idoma is part²⁸. This western concept of a world created, equipped and self-going with self charging and self directing power as Idowu correctly argues, is alien to African belief.²⁹ The Idoma in particular do not think like this, but rather anthropomorphically about their articulation and knowledge of *Ṣwɔico*. They do not know of any *Ṣwɔico* who is not “an Immanent being”³⁰ The analysis of the Idoma name of God as earlier discussed, may imply that he is far away, but, at the same time, the Idoma believe that *Ṣwɔico* is near and active in the universe as we shall discover later in the discussion. We could rightly suggest here that, with regard to the creation, control and maintenance of the universe, as far as the Idoma are concerned, only *Ṣwɔico* is the absolute origin of things, in other words *okwute*, - the Source being, and only *Ṣwɔico* has absolute power and authority, as expressed in their language, *Anu wε okwute ku ɔda doodu, mla ɔfu doodu aa*, He is the source being and all power.

Ṣwɔico's universal control is portrayed in the Idoma image of *ɔce*³¹ - a monarch king. This is because of the Idoma traditional structure that is hierarchical as observed earlier in chapter one. A common proverb in Idoma as in other African tribes is *ɔce duuma i lɛbɛka ɔwɔico a ɲma* - there is no king like God. As Parrinder rightly observes, this proverb “...is often painted as a text on the front of motor lorries, to show that God is supreme and the human will must bow to him”.³²

²⁸ For this Western false notion of African sky God, see earlier not, and also K. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, pp 217ff, and a befitting counter argument from Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 1976:154ff.

²⁹ E. B. Idowu, *African Religion*, p.155.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *ɔce* is the Idoma word for King or a monarch king.

³² G. Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, p. 31.

The Idoma believe and describe God as the most powerful $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{E}$ in heaven and earth, $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{E}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{N}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{L}\mathcal{E}$ $\mathcal{F}\mathcal{U}$ $\mathcal{F}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{Y}\mathcal{E}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{U}\mathcal{U}$, $\mathcal{I}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{U}$ $\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{M}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{J}\mathcal{E}$ God the king who is most powerful in heaven and earth.³³

Closely related to $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$'s ultimate power in the universe in Idoma, is $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$'s presence and relation to time and space and nature. The Idoma regarded him to be present everywhere as expressed in their oral proverb $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{N}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{Y}\mathcal{D}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{G}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{U}\mathcal{U}$ God who is present everywhere; $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{N}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{G}\mathcal{E}$ $\mathcal{M}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{M}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{J}\mathcal{E}$ God who sees both heaven and earth at the same time, $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{N}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{L}\mathcal{E}$ $\mathcal{M}\mathcal{U}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{G}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{U}\mathcal{U}$ \mathcal{A} . God who fills everywhere. $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{N}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{Y}\mathcal{D}$ $\mathcal{E}\mathcal{G}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{U}\mathcal{U}$ $\mathcal{L}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{B}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{K}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{O}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{U}$ $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{A}$ God that is everywhere like the wind. To the Idoma, God is present everywhere.³⁴

This $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ who is supreme, omnipresent, all powerful, frowns upon and punishes evil or bad things. A metaphor is used in Idoma to clearly convey this idea of evil and punishment. One of the most repeated phrases that carry the connotation of judgement, is the metaphor of thunder $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{K}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{A}$. $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{W}\mathcal{E}$ $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{K}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{A}$ God is thunder.³⁵ $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{E}\mathcal{K}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{K}\mathcal{A}$ \mathcal{O} $\mathcal{G}\mathcal{B}\mathcal{O}$ $\mathcal{W}\mathcal{U}$ $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{A}\mathcal{K}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{A}$ $\mathcal{N}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{O}$ - Don't let God strike you as thunder. As a growing child in Idoma, the writer remembers that the sound of thunder, God's judgement, drives us as children

³³ For further details of the Idoma portrayal of $\mathcal{D}\mathcal{W}\mathcal{D}\mathcal{I}\mathcal{C}\mathcal{O}$ as king, see R. G. Armstrong, "Idoma kings: The Nature of Their Office and Their Changing State" 1972. This is an archival material of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, department of African studies.

³⁴ These are common sayings in all the 22 Idoma districts as attested by the Idoma people during fieldwork in Idoma, July-September 1997.

³⁵ This is a general metaphor that is commonly used among the Idoma people. However, its use is more common in Ocobo, Ugboju, Adoka, Iga-Okpaya, Ugbokpo than the rest parts of Idoma.

into open confession before dad and mum of whatever we have done wrong, even the most secret of such deeds.

God is also seen as the beneficent God. We find this in the Idoma oral expression *Ṣwḍico ma eyinyinyi or omaeyininiy* - the merciful and compassionate God. He is also seen or perceived as a saviour, *Ohenyāa* He who rescues or saves a person. *Ṣwḍico* is also sovereign in holiness and righteousness, *Anu ēnē o le yōōoolō, I kla lē enya duuuma η ma* He who is clean, pure and without blemish, whose eye *I ma ēga dooduu*, sees everywhere. *Ṣwḍico* is unique and incomparable. The uniqueness of *Ṣwḍico* is the one reason why the Idoma have no images, either graven, painted or drawn of him. The Idoma express *nyḗ áma ḡ ka ḍdí ēnē a gē lē Ṣwḍico gla aa?* Whom or with what will you compare God? *ḍcē duuma ama η ka ḍda duuma i yḍ η* - no one and nothing. The very fact of *Ṣwḍico*'s uniqueness implies his transcendence. Our earlier discussion on the Idoma knowledge of God as *ḍcē* - king, emphasises his uniqueness. To the Idoma *Ṣwḍico la icō o yḍ ḍbū o kla yḍ igbīhi* - God is up, he is in the front and he is at the back. *Ṣwḍico wē ēēkpònu.* - God is one.

In the light of our discussions, and the analysis of who *Ṣwḍico* is to the Idoma, basing our analysis on the Idoma oral tradition, proverbs, sayings and the testimonies of those interviewed during fieldwork in Idoma, and the writer's personal experience and his knowledge of Idoma context, it could be suggested that, the Idoma belief in a supreme God- *Ṣwḍico*, was in no way due to any cause of Christian missionary influence or

teaching. It could be passionately suggested that their belief in *ᏌᏌᏌᏌ* has nothing to do with the missionaries. Before Christianity ever made contact with the Idoma, they already knew, who God was, and had a way of articulating that God and responding to him in worship as this chapter and subsequent ones will highlight. The Idoma have their distinctive knowledge and experience of *ᏌᏌᏌᏌ*. God is not a word borrowed from the missionaries. The Idoma knew *ᏌᏌᏌᏌ* before the missionaries arrived in Idoma.

Secondly, it could be concluded that the Idoma speak of *ᏌᏌᏌᏌ* God as a living Supreme being, who is the ultimate power in the universal hierarchy of power. He is the transcendent immanent, the all powerful one, who is the creator of the universe, the regulator, permeator, harmonizer and supporter of all the other forces that are in the universe. McVeigh needs to think again, when he generalises and argues that, “the African view of God is characterized by ambiguity.... They make no clear distinction between God and other beings”.³⁶

Among the Idoma, there is a very clear distinction between *ᏌᏌᏌᏌ* the Supreme God and other beings like *Alekwu* or *Anjenu*, as later discussion will highlight. No conclusion could better correct McVeigh’s erroneous view than the correct observation of Mungo Park, in his observation on the Yoruba concept of God, which is also applicable to the Idoma, when he said,

I have conversed with all ranks and conditions upon their faith, and can pronounce without the smallest shadow of doubt, that the belief in one God...is entire and universal among them.³⁷

³⁶ M. J. McVeigh, *God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religions and Christianity*, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Claude Stark, 1974, p. 18.

³⁷ R. Worthington, *The Life and Travels of Mungo Park*, 1883, New York, p. 21

The Idoma believe in a Supreme God called *Ɔwɔico*, who is the creator and sustainer of the universe, and the ruler of all things. In articulating His *icɔɔbga* attributes, the Idoma perceive *Ɔwɔico* as a God of, power, the most powerful and almighty, *anu eno nwune fiyɛ duu*, the invisible as epitomise in the name they give to their girls such as *ƆnyɛmaƆwɔ*, who has seen God?

3. 3. The Knowledge of Divinities

Although the Idoma believe in one supreme God, who is the source being - *Okwutɛ*, that maintains and controls the universe, they also believe in other divinities. This is not only common to the Idoma people, but as Idowu, correctly observed, “west Africa may be said to be the home of the divinities”.³⁸ Wherever you go in West Africa, the belief in divinities is very prominent. There are variations of these divinities from one African country to another. But this does not mean that the African concept of God is polytheistic, but rather it is monotheistic³⁹. This is due to the fact that the African world is under a “unitary theocratic government”.⁴⁰

These divinities were not created, but brought into being in the nature of things with regard to the divine ordering of the universe.⁴¹ They are derivatives from *Ɔwɔico*, that is they are in being in consequence of the being of *Ɔwɔico*. The powers, functions and authorities of these divinities will have no meaning outside *Ɔwɔico*. These divinities have their own local names in Idoma which is either descriptive of their roles or their

³⁸ E. B. Idowu, *African Religion*, 1976, p. 165.

³⁹ See E. B Idowu, *African Religion*, especially chapter five for a detailed discussion of this idea

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 155

natural phenomenon, which are believed among the Idoma to be the manifestation of their being as later discussion will highlight.

These divinities as earlier discussed “were brought into being as functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe”⁴². Each of these divinities in Idoma are connected to the local situation, and each is believed to be the *ɔwɔico ku* - the god of, either a particular group of people in Idoma, or their function in the ordering of the total Idoma communal life. Locally, the divinities’ local name appears to limit their scope linguistically to the Idoma locality.

In the Idoma traditional belief, these divinities also function as *ɔwɔico*’s ministers with each having a portfolio in his monarchical government. It could be suggested that they are also the intermediaries between *ɔwɔico* and man, especially with reference to their functions. So much so, that they become Idoma channels through which they believe they can approach *ɔwɔico*. They are like a half way house to the Idoma in their relation to *ɔwɔico*. In certain cases, they may be sufficient in some way, but by no means an end in themselves.

Questions have been asked time without number whether these divinities are real or not. To the Idoma, and perhaps, peoples of other African countries, especially west African countries such as Ghana, Togo, Liberia, The Gambia and Sierra Leone who believe them

⁴¹ For example, Orisanla among the Yoruba, Olokun among the Edo of Benin, and Adam ɔcanco among the Idoma were not created.

and have experienced the functions and the roles of these divinities, they are real. But to outsiders, especially westerners, to whom probably, the divinities have never had any significance, they have no real objective existence. It could however, be suggested that, it is not altogether right to assume that these divinities are not real on the ground that certain persons or group of persons have not had the experience of them. Idowu's suggestions are worth noting here,

It will be sheer presumption to claim that we know all already all that there is to know about the fact of spiritual powers and the supersensible world.⁴³

Some of these divinities that the Idoma believe in are said to be divinities of heaven, i.e., *Adamɔcanco*⁴⁴ - my father who is the king of heaven. Their origins are divine secrets which are beyond the capability of the Idoma to research. Others may be conceptualisations of *ɔwɔico*'s *icɔgba* attributes, while others are Idoma ancestors or heroes who have been deified, i.e., *Alekwu*, which we will later discuss. It would take another thesis to list and assess all of these divinities and their numbers in Idoma. However, in order to illustrate our discussions on the Idoma belief in the divinities, we will focus on three of these divinities that are significant and widely believed in Idoma.

⁴² E. B. Idowu, *African Religion*, p. 170

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 175

⁴⁴ *Adamɔcanco* is a heavenly divinity whose origin is a divine secret. The Idoma has no means or ways of probing into his existence. He functions in almost identical capacity as *ɔwɔico* - the Supreme God.

3.3.1. $\supset w \supset$

This is a personal individual god, through whom, $\supset w \supset i c o$ is approached. This divinity is represented by a tree called $U d a \supset w \supset$, which is usually planted at the centre of the family compound by the head of the family. When an individual feels all is not well, or is looking for a favour, sacrifices of fowls, and offerings of food and libations of either palm wine or *obulukutu*⁴⁵ - local beer, are offered to him. When a new child is born to an Idoma family, they are brought to the $\supset w \supset$ shrine, called $I k p o \supset w \supset$ ⁴⁶, and dedicated to the family deities. An oracle is consulted at this point to know which of the ancestors that have returned to this physical world in this baby, the child is then named either after that ancestor or a relative of that ancestor⁴⁷. A male family member of that ancestor gives the new baby a drink of water, to enable the new child, which is believed to be a reincarnated ancestor, to live at peace with the family he has returned to.

3.3.2. $A j \varepsilon$

The earth goddess, $A j \varepsilon$ ⁴⁸ who is the custodian of morality and source of fertility is highly revered in Idoma. It is believed in Idoma that $A j \varepsilon$ is a goddess of protection, and responsible for an abundant supply of crops. As our earlier discussions in chapter two indicated, the Idoma are agricultural people, therefore they attach much importance to $A j \varepsilon$. Among the Idoma she is believed to be the giver and administrator of moral laws. $A j \varepsilon$ is also seen especially among the Otukpo people as a counterpart of God, and is even

⁴⁵ Obulukutu is a local beer that is made from guinea corn or millet mixed with corn. This local beer takes nine days to brew.

⁴⁶ $I k p o \supset w \supset$ - literally means at the foot of my personal god. In other words, to be brought before a personal god.

⁴⁷ See earlier discussions on child birth and naming ceremony in Chapter two.

considered by some to be senior to God. This belief is observed in the annual Idoma prayers offered to *Aje* during the *Aje-oopa*⁴⁹ festival as cited and translated below

<i>E kwu' la en̄xi'</i>	They took the sacrifice to the east,
<i>en̄xi' ka e kwu' la en̄nē</i>	The east said, send it to the west,
<i>E kwu' la en̄nē</i>	They took the sacrifice to the West,
<i>en̄nē ka e kwu' la nw̄ico</i>	The west said, send it to God
<i>E kwu' la nw̄ico</i>	They took the sacrifice to God
<i>nw̄ico ka e kwu' la aje</i>	God said, send the sacrifice to the Earth,
<i>ohigbū ka aje nw̄ nyākwu' x̄a'</i>	For the Earth is the Senior ⁵⁰

At times *Aje* could be said to be more revered than the supreme being *nw̄ico*, as greater reverence is given to *Aje* among the Idoma. *Aje*, the earth goddess or the land goddess has always been held in high esteem, even from the days of the Idoma forbearers and during their migration from one place to another. The Idoma people moved with some soil from their last settlement, which they buried in their new settlement. In the Idoma tradition this act symbolised the Idoma belief that the new settlement was an extension of the former one.⁵¹ The place where the soil is buried becomes the shrine of the *Aje* called

⁴⁸ *Aje* is believed in Idoma as the custodian of morality, the source of fertility, God's counterpart, and even believed to be senior to God.

⁴⁹ *Aje-oopa* is the sacrificial rituals and festival celebrations for the earth goddess.

⁵⁰ Samson O. O. Amali. In his book *An Ancient Nigerian Drama*, 1985:9, is of a similar view that the earth seniors God. For a similar argument, see also R. G. Armstrong, "Idoma Religion", Ibadan, 13 Nov. 1961, p.6.

⁵¹ V. G. Okwu, "Early History of Idoma", 1974; J. O. Ikwu, "Otukpo Movements and genealogy", 1975. These are unpublished papers.

ikpoaje. The $\supset w \supset$ tree, a symbol of the personal God is planted, and the *Obiokwute*, or *Adalekwu* or *onduaje*⁵² or $\supset c \varepsilon$ takes charge of the *ikpoaje*

Traditionally, the $\supset c \varepsilon$ is regarded as a king-priest, hence in addition to his presiding over the civil and military affairs of the Idoma, he also plays the role of a chief priest for the people. At the time of the installation of the $\supset c \varepsilon$ - king, he will be taken to the place in the forest called *ukwulukwu*⁵³, where a portion of the soil is scraped up and put in a piece of $\supset pa$ - a locally woven burial cloth, folded and tied to the new chief's left hand. This traditionally signifies that the Idomaland has been committed to the chief's hand. A cock is killed and the blood is put into the chief's eyes symbolising that, if $\supset c \varepsilon$ commits any evil during his reign, he will be destroyed by the land.⁵⁴ The chief will then be brought home on the shoulders of some strong men, with dancing and the sound of drums, special music of *ukpo* and *kpancele*⁵⁵ called $\supset c \varepsilon l \varepsilon i y \bar{e} l \bar{e}$, meaning 'the chief is known or the chief has got a name'. He will remain indoors for fourteen days. Some of the soil from the *Ikpoaje* is put in the chief's house, and this forms a shrine of *Aje*, which he consults daily. It is believed that the gods reveal the things that will happen during the period of his office as chief within that period.⁵⁶

⁵² Obiokwute is the most elderly man in the Idoma community. He is also called Adalekwu, which literally means, the father of the spirits of the departed, or onduaje, meaning the owner of the land.

⁵³ Ukwulukwu is the sacred shrine where Aje is worshipped and Chiefs are buried, with the exception of the Igwumale in Ado Local Government Area that sometimes bury the chief in his room.

⁵⁴ Anyebe "Idoma secrets" 1975.

⁵⁵ This is a special traditional musical instrument that looks like a flute played at very special occasions such as described above.

⁵⁶ For details, see Ogbu. A, " $\supset c \varepsilon$ " Otukpo Historical Text, 28, 27th Nov, 1975, no. 8, pp. 179-180.

The festival of *Ajəopa* is held annually, mostly between March and April annually for *Ajε*. As we will later observe in our discussion, the timing of this festival is one of the major areas of contention in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity as this period falls within the Christian “calendrical ritual”⁵⁷ of Easter. In the Idoma tradition this *ajəopa* involves a sacrifice to the land in order to invoke the blessings of a bountiful harvest during the year. Nine days before the *ajəopa*, the people will prepare gruel or *enyi*⁵⁸ from guinea corn and during this time, there must be no beating of drums. On the day of the sacrifice, the elders and some of the people will go to the *Ikpoajε* in the forest, and set its portion of land on fire, after which they will search for the object of the sacrifice *εɔ* - stone⁵⁹. This mysterious stone is generally believed to be seen only as the god opens their eyes to see it, if not they will not see it. Failure to see it results in the failure of the sacrifice, and problems such as disasters, wars, epidemics, poor harvest for the community. The women of the community are said to be less fertile as the result of the failure of this sacrifice, and those who are already pregnant will have difficult deliveries.⁶⁰ But when the *εɔ* is found, an oracle is consulted on what to be given to the land for sacrifice. A goat or cock, will be slaughtered, depending on what the land demands, and the liver is placed on the stone and local wine - *obulukutu* poured on it. At this point the chief or his representative will pray for peace, calling the names of all the other chiefs before him. The priest, after this prayer, takes a black fowl and thrusts a stick through its hind end and pushes the stick into the ground beside the sacred *εɔ* - stone

⁵⁷ James, L. Cox (ed.), *Rites of Passage*, p. xiii.

⁵⁸ Enyi is a local non- alcoholic drink that is made from grains such as, guinea corn, corn or millet.

⁵⁹ According to one of my informant during fieldwork in Adoka 10th September 1982, Chief Oko, the Alegwu of Adoka, this *εɔ* is not just a stone, but a spiritual mystical stone with the human ability to move about and respond to the wish of the worshippers.

which is believed to have been placed there by the ancestors. The identity of the ancestor that placed it there remains unclear. The community will then bring their gifts of various types of food crops like, yams, beans, banana, corn, palm oil, and place them at the *Ajε* shrine and pray for fertility, either of the people or crops.

A special feature at this occasion involves the playing of drums called, *ukpo*, *okanga*, *uba*, *okengwu*, and flutes known as *okpancele*, *ukpana*, *engwu*, and *umolo*.⁶¹ This is very unique in the sense that, the *ɔ̃cε*-chief dances to the sound of this music, with a special shield in his left hand, and a mysterious symbol of office called *Okwutε* in his right hand. Also tied to his left hand is the piece of traditionally woven cloth called *ɔ̃pa* containing some soil, which he received on the day of his installation as chief of the Idoma people.⁶²

In the Idoma tradition this festival of *Ajεopa* must be kept sacred. In order to do this and to pay respect to *Ajε*, it is forbidden during this festival to dig or weed the land in any way, or to chop wood so as to hurt the land. Any one who breaks this instruction is regarded as unclean by the community and that individual has to be purified again, through the rites of purification which entail animal or bird sacrifice to the *Alekwu*, ancestors and above all the *Ajε* that was defiled, and by paying the stipulated fines.⁶³

⁶⁰ See R. G. Armstrong, "Idoma Religion", Ibadan, 13 Nov. 1961. P.5ff for a similar view.

⁶¹ These are very special or occasional musical instruments that are played on festive days, such as the one described above, or during the installation or death of a chief.

⁶² R.G. Armstrong, "The Dynamics and Symbolism of Idoma kingship", in *West African Cultural Dynamics*, Mouton, 1979, p. 12.

⁶³ According to Otace of Adoka, a 69 year old adult, whose duty is to kill the sacrificial animal and birds during the *ajeopa* festival, when asked on the 13th of August 1997 during fieldwork in Adoka. He

result in such an individual incurring the curse of *Ajε* - the earth goddess. Other taboos that defy the *Ajε* according to the *ɔcε Orokam*, Chief D.E enence are homicide, theft, adultery, and witchcraft, poisoning of persons within the community, and doing any work to the earth on festival days.⁶⁴ If the *Ajε* has been defied through the breaking of any of these taboos, it must be cleansed by the performance of some rituals at the *Ikpoajε* during the festival of *Ajεopa*. When the land is defiled and needs to be cleansed, emissaries are sent to bring some soil from the *ikpo'ajε*, before the sacrifice is made to the land. It is traditionally believed that if a person with a questionable character is sent on this mission, he will be afflicted with a deadly disease such as tuberculosis, leprosy or even die during the mission.⁶⁵ During fieldwork in Igwumale, the writer was informed by Apoci that an instance of this occurred in 1978, when three persons from Igwumale were sent to *Olepfu* to obtain some soil, for the sacrifice of the cleansing of the land. They had killed some Igbo people during the Nigerian civil war of 1966 to 1970, but failed to perform *uculo*⁶⁶ the rites of cleansing before they were sent. It was generally believed that they died as the result of it.⁶⁷ There is a shrine dedicated to *Ajε* called *Ikpoaje*, which is built in isolation from the community. This shrine is visited once in a year. There is an annual festival for the earth goddess called *Ejεajε*.

explained that the purification sacrifice involves the killing of a cow or a ram, and a white cock, depending the degree of the offence. And the fine includes some grain offerings and money payment to the *Opaaje*-the *Aje* priest.

⁶⁴ Chief. D. E enence, the *ɔcε orokam*, fieldwork interview, Orokam, 31st July 1977.

⁶⁵ Otukpo Local government Archives, OTKP/Idɔma Historical Text/ 1928.

⁶⁶ This is the act or acts of the performance of rituals in Idɔma.

⁶⁷ Apoci, *Fieldwork interview*, Igwumale 20th August 1997.

3. 3. 3. *Alekwū*

This constitutes the next level of the Idoma belief in the divinities. These are the spirits of the departed relatives, or ancestors of the Idoma. They are regarded as the roots of the Idoma community, as Professor Amali rightly stated, “When they are uprooted, the society dies. They guard, regulate and provide for the society”.⁶⁸ The relationship between *Alekwū* and their descendants is very strong. This relationship is regulated through the *uculo* - rituals. The Idoma *Alekwū* can be classified as superhuman beings active in bestowing blessings when they are ritually appeased, as well as occasionally bringing misfortune to their descendants such as sickness, scarcity and infertility. They see to the smooth running of the Idoma society and family lives. They are sought for protection, and defence at times of war. They are seen as great intercessors for the Idoma and their descendants. These “living dead...speak a bilingual language of human beings whom they... ‘left’ through physical death, and of the spirits to whom they are now nearer than they were when they were physical men”.⁶⁹ In the Idoma tradition they are believed to help keep the Idoma from trouble, and punish severely when they are offended. Hence, the Idoma dreads to incur the wrath of the *Alekwū* in any way by committing any offence. Most of the worship life of the Idoma is centred around the *Alekwū*, whom they consider as the intermediaries between God and man.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Samson O. O. Amali, *An Ancient Nigerian Drama*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, p. 230

⁷⁰ Armstrong, R. G. “Idoma Religion2, Ibadan, 13th Nov. 1961. Unpublished article.

would be made up of elderly men and some elderly women who have reached male status in the society, and they are no longer looked at or regarded as women, but men⁷⁴

The *Eje Alekwu* festival is held yearly for the *Alekwu* -ancestors. This is a very significant and important occasion for all sons and daughters of Idoma, due to the following reasons. First, it is the most holy and sacred festival among the Idoma community till now. Second, it brings together all the indigenes of Idoma. They will travel from far and near to Idoma to celebrate and participate in the *Eje Alekwu* festival. Third it is believed that this is the period that the *Alalekwu* or the ancestors come home from the spirit world to commune with them. Fourth, this festival is believed in Idoma as observed by James Cox in a related African situation in Zimbabwe, to “restore harmony to a cosmic and social order which in some manner has been disrupted”⁷⁵ by some spiritual forces. Fifth, it is an occasion of thanksgiving for the past Idoma year, and moments of prayer and when new covenants are made for the coming year. This festival will also include sacrifices of fowls, goats and cows that are made to the ancestors at the ancestral shrines. The ancestors at this festival are represented by ancestral masquerades such as *alekwuafiya*, wearing masks that contain in a hidden place certain relics.⁷⁶ The actual working of the masquerades *alekwuafiya* is a great secret which we are not permitted to reveal in our discussion. The traditional reasons are that the women under no circumstances must know the secrets of *alekwuafiya* or else they will not be able to bear

⁷⁴ These are very old women in the Idoma community that must have reached menopause at least twenty to thirty years prior to the period of regarding them as men

⁷⁵ James L. Cox, (ed.), *Rites of Passage*, p. xii.

⁷⁶ Though we are forbidden to explicitly describe and discuss all the information that we were given about Alekwu, we were however permitted to briefly explain that, some of the hidden relics that the Alekwuafiya

children any longer. As the saying goes in Idoma, *E le ebi kpo* – that is they have invoked upon themselves the most heinous taboo in Idoma, that will require them to undergo an elaborate purification rite, that will not only last for years, but require so much money, that the family concerned could not afford it.

3. 4. The Belief in The World of Spirits

Closely related to the belief in *Alekwū* is the Idoma belief in spirit beings called *Alelekwu* and the world of the spirit, called *ɔlekwu*. These spirits are not necessarily the spirits of the ancestors as we earlier discussed. They are of a separate category and class from the ancestors. However we must admit here that, in most cases as we examine the functions and the roles of these spirits, it could be rightly argued that these spirits and the ancestors may be classified under the same nomenclature of spirits. However, there are differences between them. For example, while the *Alekwu* or the ancestors have always been seen as being related to or part of the Idoma human family, these other spirits do not have clearly defined associations or functions. As Idowu correctly argues in the case of the Yoruba of Nigeria, which is equally applicable to the Idoma, these spirits

may be anthropomorphically conceived, but they are more often than not thought of as powers which are almost abstract, as shades or vapours which take on human shape; they are immaterial and incorporeal beings. They are so constituted that they can assume various dimensions whenever they wish to be 'seen'-they may be either abnormally small or abnormally tall, fat or thin,...when they appear beside the natural object which is their residence, they may appear in the form or shape or dimensions of the object.⁷⁷

wears are a patch of skin from the forehead, a lock of hair, fingernail, which are taken from the dead body of the ancestor the Alekwuafiya- masquerade represents.

⁷⁷ E. B. Idowu, *African Religion*, p. 173-4

To the Idoma, these spirits “are ubiquitous”⁷⁸ The Idoma traditionally believe that both the creation and its object has its own spirit, therefore in Idoma, there are human, animal, birds, botanic, water and environmental spirits, such as mountains, hills, rocks, streams, rivers, waterfalls, and the wind.⁷⁹ Some of these spirits are good ones that not only bring blessings to the Idoma community through the fortune-tellers, but inhabit some special people within the community, with a unique gift of *æi* - medicine that heals. Such person is seen as both *Obóci'* - doctor and *Adaalekwu* -the father of spirit. Such persons are believed to have also the power to make medicine *æi* for protection of farms, against injury during wars, and for some cure and prevention against witches, *ɔhɛ*, snake bites, thieves and stab wounds. There are also the disastrous and evil spirits of witches⁸⁰, which are very real to the Idoma.

These spirits have categories, and in most cases with their local names, closely associated with their functions as later examples will illustrate. No better summary is more appropriate here in our discussion on the Idoma belief in spirits, than that of Idowu, when he said, “of Spirits in Africa [in Idoma] there is no end. On the whole, they are regarded with dread, although, it is believed that one can bargain with them or that they could be controlled”⁸¹ by sacrifices and prayers. Let us at this point illustrate this belief

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 174

⁷⁹ R. G. Armstrong, “A West African inquest,” *American Anthropology*, Vol. 56, no.6, p. 1051ff. See also “The Idoma Religion” 1961.

⁸⁰ For an interesting discussion as to the reality of the spirits of witches not only to the Idoma, and Africa as a whole, see Idowu, “The Challenge of Witchcraft”, *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, IV. 1, June 1970, pp3ff.

⁸¹ E. B. Idowu, *African Religion*, p. 178.

by listing and briefly discussing some of these spirits that are so fundamental to the Idoma.

First and foremost is the *Alekwu*.⁸² Most of the religious activities of the Idoma are centred around *Alekwu*. *Alekwu* in Idoma is believed to be the intermediary not only between God and the people, but also between them and other Spirits. Most of the Idoma ancestors are classified as *Alalekwu*. - These are ancestral spirits in the supersensible world that are interested in what goes on with the Idoma in the visible world. They are mysterious powers or forces in the Idoma world, and their presence makes the Idoma live in fear. If the Idoma men and women are to enjoy life, peace and happiness, they must live according to the laid down directives of these superhuman, and supersensible beings and their agents. To qualify as ancestral *Alekwu*, it is of paramount importance for such a one to have lived a good old age life, with good moral standards, and to have been given a good Idoma traditional burial.⁸³ The *Alekwu* is always willing to intercede for the Idoma, help them in time of trouble and disasters, punish them should they offend the ancestors, and tell the Idoma when the ancestors are hungry or are being neglected by their immediate family.

Secondly, there are spirits of *Ukpo*⁸⁴ that inhabit the *ukpo* tree. *Ukpo* is believed to impart knowledge to the community and also tell the community when disaster is looming such as war, or droughts or disease epidemics. There is *ene*,⁸⁵ this is the Idoma god of justice, whose principal duty is to make sure justice is done in the community,

⁸² see earlier discussion on belief in divinities, p. 92-94.

⁸³ For good Idoma burial, see earlier discussions on burial in chapter 2, p. 61-75.

such as catching thieves, and equal treatment of women. *Uloko* and *Ugwu*⁸⁶ are spirits that protect against poisons. *Inyan'rwu*⁸⁷ is the spirit of childbirth, and the punisher of those that do evil. *Owuijeæɔŋ*⁸⁸ is the spirit of stability. This spirit only exists in Igwumale in Ado local Government of Benue State, Nigeria.

Thirdly, and finally in our list of examples is the *Anjenu*⁸⁹. This spirit is both good and harmful. *Anjenu* is good when this spirit acts to protect, heal deranged persons, and acts as giver of children to barren women. Normally, every child that is born in Idoma is dedicated to the *Anjenu*. In the Idoma tradition, girls are classified as the wife of *Anjenu* until their marriage. And in order for such girls to be happy in their new married homes, and to be fertile for childbirth, a sacrifice must be made to the *Anjenu*, to release such girls from his hand before she sleeps with her husband. And if this is not done, it is believed among the Idoma people that she will not only become barren, but prone to be deranged, unstable, turned mad and eventually die.⁹⁰ *Anjenu* can be bad, when it possesses a person. Not only will he turn such person into *Atam'kpá'*⁹¹, but drives him from the community to go and live in the river, forest or a refuse dump, thereby becoming very antisocial and dangerous to the community.

⁸⁴ Ukpo is the Idoma tree of wisdom or spirit of knowledge. And prophesy.

⁸⁵ ene is a female God of justice who is only worshipped by the Idoma women.

⁸⁶ Uloko and Ugwu are protective spirits. They are symbolised by the trees after which they are named.

⁸⁷ This is the spirit of childbirth which is worshipped not only by the Idoma people, but also by the Idoma neighbour, the Igbo people.

⁸⁸ There is a very close similarity between *owuijeæɔŋ* and the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament. It is hoped future studies will investigate this.

⁸⁹ See earlier discussion on the Idoma marriage for the roles and functions of this spirit.

⁹⁰ Though this is a general belief in Idoma, such belief is not widely held in Idoma totally, with the exception of Agila where such beliefs are still strongly held.

3. 5. Worship and Sacrifice

In his treatment of the traditional view of worship in Africa in his book *African Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, McVeigh, is correct in his suggestion that, "The African is deeply religious, and his religious sentiments express themselves in worship".⁹² This is definitely true of the Idoma people who are very religious. They could also be described as a worshipping and sacrificing community. The Idoma, always seek fellowship and communion with *ƆwƆico*, -the supreme being; the *Alekwu*, ancestors and other spiritual beings, whom they believe are part and parcel of their daily lives, and the guardian of the Idoma community. The Idoma are very religious instinctively and they must worship and sacrifice to something.

What is this Idoma worship? We will simply define this as the Idoma response to the awareness of a divinity, supreme, ancestral, or spiritual. Worship denotes the worthiness of an individual divinity to receive honour in accordance to that worth. Idoma worship points them beyond man to the mystery overriding the Idoma existence. To the Idoma, worship is a 'consent to Being'. It is the Idoma's "act or acts of turning to God"⁹³ - *ƆwƆico*. This worship is "an imperative urge..., the basic instinct which was evoked in [Idoma] by the very fact of [Idoma] confrontation with the numinous"⁹⁴ Idoma worship is their spontaneous act either collectively or individual, as the Idoma heart meditates on the divinity.

⁹¹ This is a water spirit, that drives its victim into the river at any time of the day, but mostly at nights.

⁹² M. J. McVeigh, *God in Africa*, p.103.

⁹³ J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, p. 178.

⁹⁴ E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare*, p. 107.

3. 5. 1. *ɛya* - sacrifice is an integral part of the Idoma worship. The Idoma have various reasons for worship. According to some of our informants during fieldwork in Idoma, they worship or sacrifice in order to secure *Ɔwɔico*'s active favour or that of the *Alekwu*, divinities, ancestors or spirits.⁹⁵ Secondly, they worship to ensure the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of the Idoma people and their land.⁹⁶ Thirdly, they worship to establish a relationship between them and the object of their worship.⁹⁷ The Idoma especially worship *Ɔwɔico*, - the source of being, because they owe their destiny to Him. The Idoma will never worship what they can manipulate or control. There are supreme being, divinities and other unseen spiritual forces, or powers, some good others evil, that are beyond the Idoma control, and they must worship to maintain good links with such powers. Worship in Idoma can be said to mean in the words of Mbiti of Idoma

...renewing contact between people and God, or between people and the invisible world.... Worship is also used as a means of creating harmony in the world of mankind.... Through worship man cultivates a spiritual outlook on life.... Acts of worship are a means of linking the spiritual and physical worlds, putting the invisible in touch with the visible.⁹⁸

From our observation during fieldwork in Idoma, it could be suggested that there are seven main features or characteristics of the Idoma worship. Firstly, there are liturgies⁹⁹ in Idoma worship. These are the means of communicating with the Idoma object of worship. These include the beating of a primal instrument of worship called *Oke*¹⁰⁰. The

⁹⁵ Abɔje ɛɔ, fieldwork interview, Umogidi, 3rd August 1997.

⁹⁶ ɔkwu, fieldwork interview, Iwili in Adoka district, 4th august 1997.

⁹⁷ Ibid, Abɔje.

⁹⁸ J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, London, 1975, p. 54-55.

⁹⁹ See Chapter seven for detail discussion on the Idoma liturgy.

¹⁰⁰ *Oke* - it is difficult to find a dynamic equivalence of *oke* in English or give a back translation in English. However, *oke* is a metal instrument, which can be between two feet to ten feet long. A piece of wood is used in playing this instrument.

worship. These include the beating of a primal instrument of worship called *Oke*¹⁰⁰. The playing of the *oke* calls the attention of the object of worship to the place of the worship. When the officiating priest is satisfied, through a spiritual medium that the object of worship is present to receive his worship, the priest continues with the worship, by pouring water on the ground, symbolically establishing a cool and calm atmosphere, during this period of worship. This will be followed with invocations and recitations of names of the various ancestors, praises, and other *icɔɔgba* attributes of the divinity, such as *Adam nɛ o ge fiyɛ ada ɔɔɛ* - my father that surpasses all other people's father, *awɔ nɛ o le ma otu, i ma ɛɔɔ* - you who sees at night and day, *ɔda duuma i ke gwo wɔ aje jejejeje ɛɛ ɲ* - nothing has ever overpowered you. In doing this the *Idɔma* worshipper hopes to secure the attention of the divinity and cause such divinity to be favourable to his prayers. Secondly, *Inalegwu*. - Prayers in which he begins this prayer by stating his case, Such as,

<i>A ke m̄a um ɛ̄ɛ</i>	you see me
<i>a j̄ɛ ɔd̄a n̄ɛ o ȳa ɛ̄ɛ n̄ɛ n w̄a ic̄ɛ aa</i>	you know why I come today
<i>ayi n̄ɛ a je ga am aa</i>	the children that you gave to me
<i>ōc̄ɛ, ɛ̄niɛ, ɛ̄h̄a òw̄ɛ</i>	sickness, hunger, poverty, suffering
<i>ḡaa je uw̄a kp̄ò ɲ̄mo ɛɛ</i>	are about to kill them
<i>A i le eyi kwum ʼancaʼ kp̄ōōōo</i>	will you continue to look at me like this?
<i>Um w̄a ka a le l̄ɛ le gw̄a</i>	I come that you eat, drink
<i>ka ɔ̄ũ k̄u wo k̄o le gbo</i>	so that your mind will cool, and calm down

¹⁰⁰ Oke - it is difficult to find a dynamic equivalence of oke in English or give a back translation in English. However, oke is a metal instrument, which can be between two feet to ten feet long. A piece of wood is

ka a lε ab̄ t̄a' um that you help me

*ip̄u' εgb̄a' k̄u' um nyā.*¹⁰¹ In this my need

This is just but one of such prayers stating the Idoma case before worship. Some of the needs may be private, communal; before and after war, agricultural and all other Idoma occasions, times and seasons. Most prayers are expressed in words as stated above, but sometimes they will use gestures in their communication with the supernatural. For an example, if an Idoma person is highly wronged, with a very high degree of arrogance on the part of the person that offends him or her and there is nothing else he or she can do about it, the person will come to *odudu* ¹⁰² look up to *ɔwɔico*, raises his or her hands up with the palm wide open, and the eyes firmly looking up says, *ɔwɔico nε* - It is God's. After which that person will no longer push the problem any further, but leaves it to God to fight on his or her behalf. The Idoma worship is normally led by the family priest, or the most elderly man in the Idoma local community, who is believed to be in contact with the world beyond and the *Alekwu* or ancestors.

Thirdly, these prayers are usually accompanied with *ɛyaoogwo*¹⁰³. There are various types of sacrifices in Idoma depending on the need occasion and the season. They range from *Ajε̄ōpa*¹⁰⁴ - sacrificing to the Land, *ɔwɔōpa*¹⁰⁵ which, will normally require a cock or a male goat, plus some local wine called *obulukutu* or *enyi* which is non alcoholic.

¹⁰¹ This prayer was observed in Ocobo during the worship of Ibobo during my field work in Ocobo on the 22nd of July 1997.

¹⁰² *oduda* is the centre of the Idoma family compound

¹⁰³ *ɛyaoogwo* are the various sacrifices in Idoma.

¹⁰⁴ See earlier discussions on *Aje* for details.

¹⁰⁵ *ɔwɔōpa* is a sacrifice to a personal God

Inyila⊃*ε*¹⁰⁶ -this is when a woman has defiled the family compound by using some taboo words to insult another person, such as calling an *Ocobo* man *ewo*- dog, attracts a sacrifice of purification consisting of a sacrifice of a cow, a black ram, some grain, drinks and a feast for the elders and the young men of the community.¹⁰⁷ This sacrifice in most cases is required by the elders of the community should a woman commit adultery. The wife and her parents must pay the cost of the sacrifice only. She must perform this sacrifice and sanctify the land, appease *Alekwu* and the ancestors and purify her marriage relationship. Failure to do this according to the Id⊃ma tradition will result in her husband not being allowed by the elders to sleep with her.

There is the *iyē oōgwu*¹⁰⁸ - in which a person is purified and cleansed by the confessing of the person's sins on either a goat or a chicken and driving it to the bush, or making such confession on a money coin and putting such money at cross roads, hoping that whoever picks that money has picked all your bad omens with it. There is also the *Anjenu*¹⁰⁹ sacrifice. There are others such as *ej'ebī*, *oh'ebi*, *Ibobo*, *inyanwū*, *⊃w⊃oofu*, *alekwū ooya'* etc that future studies may elucidate. These sacrifices are where the Id⊃ma render something to the supernatural being or beings in order to achieve a given aim or end. This sacrifice as pointed out earlier may involve the shedding of the blood, either human or animal's or bird's, and local beer and other non- alcoholic local drinks, and some feasts, either for a select group of persons or the community as a whole.

¹⁰⁶ *Inyila*⊃*ε* is a purification sacrifice

¹⁰⁷ Mr. ⊃ganyi, fieldwork interview, Ocobo, 15th August, 1996. Mr. ⊃ganyi is over 98 years, and the oldest man in Ocobo and the whole of Oglewu district.

¹⁰⁸ *Iyeoogwu* is a cleansing sacrifice. It is also an appropriation sacrifice, and similar to the sacrifice of atonement among the Hebrew people.

¹⁰⁹ see earlier discussion on spirits, p. 104 ff.

The fourth feature of Idoma worship is the *ehi*.¹¹⁰ This may involve human beings, animals, food stuffs, water, wine, and money, depending on the need and the reason, and occasion for the sacrifice and the offering

The fifth feature, is the objects of worship and sacrifice, which includes *ɔwɔco*, the supreme God, Alekwu, the ancestors and the spirits¹¹¹

The sixth feature is the place of worship and sacrifice. This includes shrines, rivers or streams, family compound, and crossroads, and under some sacred trees¹¹²

The seventh is the participants. This includes the worshipper, the divinities and the supernatural beings, and some class of elders and some very older women who are classified as male in the community who eat the sacrificial meals.

3. 6. The Idoma World, Life After Death and Reincarnation

It may be rightly stated that all human beings have presuppositions through which they see the world. There are two terms that are commonly used in the study of any man's world view. These are cosmogony and cosmology. Both are compounded from the Greek word Kosmos- the world and gonos - generation. In most cases, cosmology will be used to refer to the science of the origin of the earth, and to the various theories of the formation of this material world, or universe, and cosmogony on the other hand refers to

¹¹⁰ *ehi* is the giving of offerings.

¹¹¹ see earlier discussions on pages 104-107

¹¹² Some of the sacred trees in Idoma are ukpo, Uloko, *ɔdaɔwɔ* and Iklaga

the world or world order¹¹³ The Idoma world in all of its totality, that is, material, spiritual, social and cultural is made intelligible to them by the Idoma cosmology. This is what explains to them how everything came to be. The Idoma world like that of many other Africans is twofold. The world of man, and the world of the spirit, or this world and the world beyond. Let us examine these worlds briefly:

3. 6. 1. First $\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon$ - the Physical World, or the World of Man.

Central to the thinking of the Idoma, is his visible world, peopled by human beings, and things, both living and non-living.¹¹⁴ The western world view of natural order, which inexorably goes on as planned, is strange to the Idoma. The Idoma world is a dynamic one, a moving equilibrium, constantly threatened by social calamities and other disasters, such as droughts, famine, epidemic disease, and other supernatural or antisocial forces such as witches and sorcerers. The Idoma according to $\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon\text{kwu } \supset\text{gbu}$ and Mr Agbiti believe that these forces that disturb the physical world are controllable through worship, sacrifices and offerings.¹¹⁵

2. 6. 2. Second $\mathcal{A}\acute{e}kw\bar{u}$ - The World of the Spirit, and the home of the Ancestors

To the Idoma, this physical, visible world is not on its own. It is enveloped by the spiritual world of the Alekwu and the ancestors and the spirits. The world of *Alekwu*, ancestors or spirits according to Mr. Oke $\supset\text{na}$ could be in the underground, underworld or

¹¹³ For full discussions of this theory, see *Encyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1969), s.v "cosmogony" and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed, ed 1932.

¹¹⁴ For a similar view on the Idoma world, see Forde, Daryll, *African worlds: Studies in Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of the African Peoples*, London, Oxford University Press 1954.

¹¹⁵ Mr. $\supset\text{gbu}$, ϵ & Agbiti, fieldwork interview, $\supset\text{pa-Adoka}$, 10th September 1996

nether world. Sometimes it could be in the forest, rivers or waterfalls, mountains and hills, or around the homes of human beings¹¹⁶ where the 'living dead' linger around for a short period or a longer period¹¹⁷. The Idoma traditionally believe that some of the disasters, such as famine, plagues, sickness, infertility, and death of infants are the work of these spiritual beings or some of the ancestors who want to keep the infants.¹¹⁸ Through this visible world, appeals, worship and sacrifices will be made to these supernatural spiritual beings or forces that have some, if not total and ultimate control over the Idoma interest and destinies. Both this world and the one beyond are created by *ɔwɔico*. To understand Idoma's perception of creation, it is worthwhile to examine some of the descriptive terms used for creation in Idoma and probe some of their creation myths. For example, in the Idoma language, the verb *yá* to make or do is only used in relation to God, when they think of creation. *ɔwɔico yá* or *adamɔcāncō yá*, - God makes or my father the king of heaven makes.

To the Idoma people, their ancestors who are their closest links to the spiritual world are the inhabitants of the world beyond. These ancestors are the Idoma "living dead"¹¹⁹.

To them, death does not write 'finish' to the human life, but only a transition to the next world, as expressed in the Idoma oral proverb *ó i tá ɛga ádā nū* - he or she has gone to his or her father, or *ó i ta ɔé*, he or she has gone home. These expressions which the Idoma use to describe death and relate to it highlights their concept of life after death,

¹¹⁶ Mr. ɔna, fieldwork interview, Umogidi, 10th July 1996

¹¹⁷ See also Mbiti 1970:257-258.

¹¹⁸ Ademū Agabi, fieldwork interview, Ogwule, Agatu, September 6th, 1986. This is a wide spread belief in Idoma, that those in the world beyond are mostly responsible for their problems in this physical world.

¹¹⁹ J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, 1970, p. 230.

and that beyond this life there is another one. They believe that there is a continuation of life beyond this visible world, in which the departed had gone to live,¹²⁰ with others who already live there. In the Idoma tradition as shown by the testimony of Mr Obinya, in this next world, people don't suffer hardships such as hunger, sickness or death, but it is a place where happiness, comfort, pleasure, eating and drinking exist.¹²¹ It is the home of *abahi* and *ebɔ*¹²² As discussed earlier, the burial rites¹²³ in Idoma, show that they believed in life after death before they ever made contact with Christianity. For example, during burial ceremonies, the deceased are given money, clothes and all the other things that they will need for the next life. Relatives of those, who earlier lost their loved ones come to send the corpse with messages and some money and even clothes, to their departed relatives who exist and live in the world beyond. Chiefs are buried with slaves to help the chief carry his goods to the world beyond, and at times the youngest wife of the chief is buried alive with the chief, in order to live with him in the world beyond. To the Idoma therefore, as Awolalu correctly observes, "death does not write "the end" to human life, but opens the gate to the hereafter...hence prominence is given to belief in a continuation of life after death¹²⁴ in Idoma

¹²⁰ See J. O. Awolalu, "African Traditional Religion as an Academic discipline", *Religion: Journal of Nigerian Associations for the Study of Religion*, dec. 1976:23

¹²¹ Mr. Obinya, *Bible translation fieldwork interview*, Igboanɔŋaaje in Otukpo, 9th July 1982. Mr Obinya is one of the elders in Otukpo who possesses a great knowledge of the Idoma tradition. He is well versed in the inquest and Alekwu systems. At the time of my conversation with him, he was about 76 years old. He sadly died in September 1993 just two years before the start of this research.

¹²² Abahi is comfort and ebɔ is peace.

¹²³ see earlier discussion in chapter 2. p. 61-76.

3. 6. 3. Reincarnation

There is a belief in Africa in general and in Idoma in particular that “death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter”.¹²⁵ The Idoma believe in reincarnation. Among the Idoma people, it is traditionally believed that their relatives or ancestors who have departed this life, can return again to this visible world in a baby. If one examines the names that they give to their children, one could clearly observe that some of those names reflect their belief in reincarnation and life after death. For example, if a boy is born immediately after the death of the head of the family or an elder, that boy will be called one of the following names *Adakole* meaning the father of the house has returned, or he is called *ɔgbɔɛ* - the head of the family has come to look after his house, or *Ada*, or *Adam*, my father has reincarnated, or *ɔnyilɔkwu*, *ɔnyilɔwa*, - a man dies and comes back again. If such child is a girl, she is called *enɛ* - the mother is back, *enɛkole*, the mother of the house etc. This is a wide spread phenomenon, among the Idoma. There are numerous evidences and such examples in Idoma that confirm their belief in reincarnation.¹²⁶ Every child that is born among the Idoma is traditionally believed to be a reincarnation of one of the family ancestors or relatives, and sometimes a dear friend promised before dying that he or she is going to come back to this friend in a child. Such children are named accordingly as cited above. To the Idoma therefore, life is

¹²⁴ J. O. Awolalu, cited in J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, 1970, p. 230-231..

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.264

¹²⁶ See for example, Samson, O. O. Amali, *An ancient Nigerian Drama*, Franz Stener Verlag Wiesbaden, GMBH, Stuttgart, 1985; R. G. Armstrong, "Idoma Religion" Ibadan, 13th Nov, 1961; "Idoma Speaking Peoples" in Daryll Forde (ed.), *The Peoples of the Niger-Benue Conference, West Africa, Part x, Ethnographic Study of Africa*, London, 1955.

an ever-cyclic movement. It is a case of *nyilɔkwu nyilɔwa* - man dies and man forever comes back.¹²⁷

This chapter examined Idoma primal theology, which we defined as an interpretation and translation of God's revelation and self disclosure in a given Idoma context, and beyond. It is tolerant of other religions and possesses its sources in the Idoma history, language, culture, arts and music. It has its basic creeds and beliefs that are traditionally passed on from one Idoma generation to another. It is the interpretation of the Idoma pre-Christian experiences of God. We then went on to examine the basic structures of this Idoma theology which includes a belief in *ɔwɔico* - the supreme God. We concluded that the Idoma belief in the supreme God was in no way influenced or due to any cause of Christian missionary influence or teaching. The second structure of this theology was the belief in the divinities, which have various functions in the ordering of the total Idoma communal life. Detailed attention was given to three of these divinities *ɔwɔaje* and *Alekwu* that are very significant to the Idoma community. A third structure, which is their concept of the world of spirit, was considered. We suggested here that, although, these spirits are not necessarily the spirit of the ancestors, but in a close examination of their roles, they could be classified under the same nomenclature. We then examined worship and sacrifice, and concluded that the Idoma are a worshipping and sacrificing community. This enables them to always be in communion with *ɔwɔico* and other spiritual beings, whom they believe are part and parcel of their daily lives and the guardian of their community. We finally discussed the Idoma world, life after death and

¹²⁷ See Samson O. O. Amali, *An Ancient Nigerian Drama*, 1985, p. 12.

reincarnation, and concluded that to the Idoma death does not annihilate life, but that life continues in this world and the hereafter or the next world.

This Idoma primal theology we suggested, does contain a coherent body of belief and an interpretation of life which alone can provide the foundation for a genuine interaction between the Idoma and Christianity. This Idoma primal theology and religious experience should in our view occupy the central place in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. The Idoma past religious experiences are not illusory. They should form the main vehicle for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. This we will examine in our next chapter on early interaction of the Idoma and the missionaries.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IDOMA AND THE MISSIONARIES: EARLY INTERACTIONS

4.1 The Opening of Idoma: The Railway Track

“It has been said that Christianity follows trade, but in the Idoma situation, it could be said that Christianity followed the railway”¹. The finding of coal in 1922 in the Udi District of the then Anambara State and the current Enugu State could be said to have been the main cause of the missionaries making contact with the Idoma people². In order to make use of this commodity throughout Nigeria and beyond it became necessary to lay a railway track in order that it might be brought down to the sea and by that means placed within the reach of the various concerns that required the use of such material. Therefore, work soon began on the construction of the railway track. This new railway track passed through the Idomaland, which prior to that period was unknown to the Methodist missionaries, but later it became an exciting discovery through the rail track. Banham in reporting the discovery of the Idoma people through the railway track to his home Church in London said,

This new track of railway is running through the portion of the country which has been allocated to our church by the conference of missionary societies quite a few years ago. This area is something like 50 miles wide and is bounded on the east by the Scottish Missions and on the west by the Church Missionary Society. By this means there is opened up to civilisation a vast population of native peoples altogether untouched by any missionary society³

¹ Rev. Banham, “Missionary Extension in Nigeria: Challenge of the North,” Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Advance*, August 1924.

² Rev. Banham, Primitive Methodist Leader, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Advance*, 14th September 1924

³ Rev. Banham, Primitive Methodist Leader, Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *The Call of Nigeria I*, 14th September 1922.

It is observed from this report that the railway track that passed through Idoma became an opening or a helpful link through which the missionaries could make contacts with the Idoma people. It is also noted that one of the aims of the missionaries in making contact with the Idoma people at that period was not for the spreading of the gospel only, but for the civilisation of the Idoma people. Banham correctly observed that up to that point no missionary contact had been made with the Idoma who had remained a very secretive people, closely knit together through paternal family ties, and who had resisted any attempt of outside influence⁴ However, the railway track that was at that time being built northwards from the Eastern Region of Nigeria, now the current Enugu State provided some employment for some Igbo⁵ workers from the east, who now lived among the Idoma for work purposes. Many of these Igbo workers had earlier made contact with Christianity, through The Primitive Methodist missionaries who, by 1924, had been well established in the eastern part of Nigeria⁶. The Igbo workers needed pastoral care and oversight. It was hoped that they in turn would spread “the gospel among the Idoma people in whose country they were living and working”⁷.

4.2. Reasons for Advance into Idoma

There were therefore, “very worthy causes for the extending of the frontiers of the Kingdom into Okpoto [Idoma] country”⁸. These ‘worthy causes’ as already indicated in our discussion are the pastoral needs of the Igbo Christians and their potential of

⁴ See earlier discussion on the Idoma identity in chapter two.

⁵ Igbo has been known and identified in the past as Ibo, however, the Igbo people have rejected being called the Ibo, as this name does not represent their identity in any way, but just a convenient phonetic sound of the colonial masters in the colonial days who could not correctly call and pronounce their name which is Igbo. We would in this study, unless where a text is being cited, use, their proper name which is Igbo in identifying the Igbo people. We would also refer to their land as Igboland.

⁶ Famulusi *Methodism in Nigeria* (1842-1992), 1992, p.87

⁷ Ivan Chetwynd: *Seed Time*, Spiritan Press Makurdi, 1973, p. 1.

spreading the Christian faith among the Idoma people. However, Banham in his article “Reasons for Extension”⁹ to the home church in Britain gave five further reasons as to why they should make contact with the Idoma people. The first was what he described as the colossal need of the Idoma people. He said,

There are many reasons why we should take up this work at once. The strongest possible plea is found in the stupendous need of the people. These people have but the faintest idea of life beyond the animal within them. They live in a state of dense moral darkness. They are a prey to every kind of superstition. Spiritually they do not know their right hand from their left hand and all kinds of cruelty and tyranny are practised in the name of religion. Infanticide, headhunting, murder and all kinds of oppression are rife. The people live in entire ignorance of the most elementary decencies of life. In too many cases they are callous and brutally indifferent to the sufferings of others. The truth is that the heathen conditions are scarcely describable. This should appeal to us, and call forth the only response worthy of a Christian people. The way is open. The need is tremendous and urgent. The people are waiting for our approach. It is comparatively easy for us now to gain an entrance. But if there is a delay this phase may give place to another when the difficulties of the opening of Mission will be in time multiplied and greatly magnified¹⁰.

From the first reason that was given by Rev. Banham, for the missionary contact with the Idoma, we observed that the Idoma people were branded with all sorts of titles and names. Such descriptions were unfair views of the Idoma people and did not represent the true Idoma situation at that time. For example, in our earlier discussion in chapters two and three, we clearly set out the Idoma people with their own unique way of civilisation with the context of their social, political and religious structures, and with distinct religious beliefs and clear knowledge of the supreme God *Ɔwɔico* and well defined religious beliefs and practices. How could they possibly have been described as

⁸ Methodist Church in Great Britain, MSS Archives, *Norcross Diary*, p.1

⁹ Banham, Methodist Church in Great Britain, Archives, Primitive Methodist Leader, *Call of Nigeria* 2, 23/11/22

¹⁰ Ibid.

people without religion, civilisation and morals? Banham's article was intended for his home church, so it is possible he had to say such things as the ones cited about the Idoma, in order to attract support and personnel for the missionary work in Idoma. However, what he said in his article represented a false view of the Idoma people. Such views could not represent the socio- religious situation of the Idoma at this time.¹¹

His second reason was the fear of the threat of Islamic influence in Nigeria as a whole and in Idoma in particular. He perceived Islam as a menace threatening Nigeria, a poison against the cross and a hindrance to the missionary propaganda. He argued,

Let us not forget the Mohammedan menace threatening Nigeria. The followers of Mohammed are operating along the railway as traders and every trader is a missionary of his faith and friends with the chief and headmen of the town, sowing seeds, which poison them against the cross. Should they spread their baleful influence over the people it would prove to be the greatest hindrance to missionary propaganda. Their hunting ground is the untouched heathen, where with the speciousness unsurpassed by any other class of missionary, they corrupt their mind and make them oblivious to any Christian influence. For Islam to gain a hold on these heathen folk would add to the severity of the task beyond comprehension¹².

These views would be a legitimate concern for any one who was never aware of the Idoma dealings with the Hausa Fulanis from the past. However, while the Islamic influence in Idoma may be a very genuine missionary concern, the Idoma from their past history have successfully resented or resisted any Islamic domination.¹³

¹¹ Later discussion will highlight why Banham and possibly other missionaries had such a false and negative view of the Idoma people and their religion, past values and language.

¹² Banham, *call of Nigeria* p. 2

¹³ See earlier discussion on the efunya- the horse war in chapter 2, p.29.

This was followed by the third reason which was the fear of other missionary bodies entering Idoma land. He said,

It is very important that we enter upon this new work immediately because the people in some towns along the railway are already asking for mission agents. The CMS has work at the colliery town and are some 20 miles nearer this new section than our nearest missionary residing at Nara who at the present is also working the Ovim station which precludes him giving attention to this advanced work whilst he is most anxious concerning it. The people do not understand anything about missionary boundaries and consequently have applied to the mission nearest to them about a teacher. The missionary may be able to put them off for a while but the time will come when they will think that we are unable to respond to the requests and will place teachers in these towns. This being done it would be no easy matter to control and if such transference prove impossible it would be tantamount to closing the front door to our advance. We need to avoid such an impasse and the only way to do so is to extend our outpost and place an advance guard further the field.¹⁴

Rev. Banham believed that, unless the advance to the Idoma was made immediately, it would be too late and other mission agents might have got there.

He fourthly suggested that it was necessary for them as missionaries to make new exploits for their own good. He argued,

It is of great consequence that we make this advance to the quickening of missionary fervour.... We must keep our eyes forward and make fresh adventures. It is almost six years since the Nara station was opened. It is high time we took another step into the great beyond¹⁵.

He finally argued that if past experiences were things to go by, then they must advance to the Idoma. He concluded,

We have every encouragement for pursuing such a course, when we take into consideration the phenomenal success which had crowned our labours hitherto... If the progress only of the last decade be taken achievements are more

¹⁴ Banham, *Call of Nigeria*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

hitherto...If the progress only of the last decade be taken achievements are more wonderful still.... We need to be there. We ought to be there. We must be there to share in the great triumphs of Grace that are coming to that country. We should set apart at least two men to enter this field.... The field is white unto harvest. Therefore send forth the labourers together in the harvest ¹⁶.

4. 3 The Advance into Idoma

These reasons were also presented to the General Missionary Council who were deeply impressed, and urged "the immediate necessity of going forward to contest the right of the heathen superstition to continue to enthrall and degrade the African people"¹⁷. A deputation was then appointed by the Council of Missionaries in Nigeria to visit the Idoma people and report their findings to the council¹⁸. The party of Revs Dodds, Banham and Finlay were detailed by the Missionary Council to visit and report on "the unmissioned areas beyond (sic)... the present to the farthest North"¹⁹. After the visit, Rev. F.W Dodds reported to the Missionary Council,

"the most exciting thing of all, something which promptly marked out a wider skyline yet for someone some day to reach, was to find ourselves in contact with an entirely new tribe. Even at Igumale (sic) the first thing we had learned had been that we had overshot Iboland by some 15 miles. We are in the Land of the Okpoto [Idoma] peoples....We saw much of these Okpoto peoples, indeed more than we saw of Ibos. Three days we sojourned amongst them, scouring the countryside on our cycles, going into every hole and corner of these most representative towns, and gathering together a few of their words to compare with Ibo. For the Okpotos speak a language all their own, which as far as we can discover has never yet been written"²⁰.

There were lots of excitements about this visit. First was the joy of being able to make the journey. Second was the realisation that Idomaland was bigger than they thought, and the

¹⁶ Ibid., p.3

¹⁷ Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives "Missionary Extension in Nigeria. Challenge of the North", *Advance*, August 1924, p. 5

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, "Into The Big Blue In Nigeria", *Primitive Methodist Leader* 2.4, p. 212

third was the discovery of the Idoma language, which had never been written at the time of Dodds' report.

The deputation also reported back to the Council that the Idoma were "a people prepared and waiting for the coming of the Evangel".²¹ Among other things, they also reported that,

...of the readiness of this new country to be missioned the deputation has no doubts whatever, nor indeed of its eagerness for our educational services at least.... We were everywhere received with manifest tokens of pleasure.... We were particularly struck by the opportunity presented by the Okpoto speaking people. Their reception of us was if possible warmer than that of the Ibos.... Their language is not yet written. There is not a single mission school or church in the whole area.... We are earnestly of the belief that something should be done at once for this country. A little can be done by native agency.... The G.M.C should be urged to establish at least one European in this new country within the next six months if possible²².

This report strongly emphasised the Idoma readiness to receive the missionaries. They demonstrated this, to the deputation that visited them not only by giving them a warm reception, but with gifts. The Idoma anxiousness for education is also in the report. Why, therefore were the Idoma people so ardent to receive the missionary education?²³

Following the full explanation and the authentication of the deputation's report, the Primitive Methodist missionaries from Eastern Nigeria felt that there were

very worthy causes giving rise to the extending of the frontiers of the kingdom into the Okpoto [Idoma] Country, and the opening of the Okpoto Mission²⁴.

²⁰ Rev. F.W Dodds, "Peoples of the Mist", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 17th April 1924, p. 245

²² Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Sound The Advance*, "The Story of a Pioneering Tour", AW 140, p. 13 ff.

²³ A later discussion in chapter five would highlight why the Idoma people were so keen on the educational programme of the church.

²⁴ Norcross Journal p.1

We...recognise the responsibility resting upon us for the evangelisation of these peoples. We would especially recognise the call of the Okpoto people by the warmth of their reception of our missionaries and their expressed willingness to receive our workers”

That we instruct the Nigerian council to take immediate steps for the advance of our work into this territory as soon as arrangements can be completed.”

“That we approve the appointment of teachers to act under the direction of the Rev. C. Finlay”

“That we approve the suggestion of the appointment of a European to establish a new mission.” These resolutions definitely commit us to the advance and we confidently present the case to our people.²⁵

Following these resolutions, in May 1924, the Rev. Finlay who was stationed at Agbani in Eastern Nigeria,

made a prolonged journey into the Okpoto Country...visiting Ogbahu to Oturkpo(sic) with stations in between, i.e. Eha, Igumale (sic), Utonkon and Otobi and several places adjacent to these different towns. As a result of this visit schools were promised and begun in the following places Igumale(sic), Otobi, Ikwonyi, Utonkon, Ikpomorokpo Utonkon, Otukpoasa, Oturkpo Ikpo(sic) Oturkpo Ichp (sic) and Agila.²⁶

At the completion of Finlay’s first journey by the end of May 1924, an Igbo man Mr.

Albert Nwosu, was left at Igwumale to have charge of the work and establish the school.²⁷

Albert worked through June and July. On the 25th July 1924, Rev & Mrs. Finlay made a second visit to Idoma. They continued further north to Makurdi, where the Igbo people who were labourers with the railway construction met them. The Igbos were already holding their own services in Makurdi before Rev. & Mrs. Finlay arrived there²⁸. Rev.

²⁵ Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, “The Story of a Pioneering Tour” *Sound The Advance* p. 16

²⁶ Norcross Journal p.1. Also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, 1973, p. 1-2.

²⁷ Norcross Journal .p 1

²⁸ Norcross Journal .p 35

& Mrs. Finlay joined in the service and “promised that a missionary would visit them again”²⁹.

This promise was fulfilled when on the 16th September 1924, Rev. William Norcross, together with The Rev. Robert Banham arrived in Igwumale. They stayed in the Railway Rest House for two days, to meet the Igwumale Chiefs and the people and tried unsuccessfully to find a suitable mission site³⁰. They continued their journey after two days to Otukpo where they met Capt. Noel Smith³¹. They were well received at Otukpo and they proceeded to Makurdi to hold services for the Igbo railway workers³². Rev. Banham later went back to Uzakoli in the Eastern part of Nigeria, while Rev. Norcross and Albert Nwosu who was first left in charge of the work returned to Igwumale the first point of missionary contact in Idoma, and stayed at the Railway Rest House. They searched for a Mission site, which was eventually found. By “the beginning of December, [Norcross] was living there in a ‘Suite of Native buildings’”³³.

Norcross soon started the work of site clearing, and laid the foundation of the present Igwumale manse in July 1925, and eventually occupied it in February 1926.³⁴ Thus a mission station was opened in Idoma thereby establishing an official missionary presence among the Idoma people.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Capt. Noel Smith was the colonial District Officer at Otukpo, the headquarter of the Idomaland.

³² Norcross Journal, p. 35

³³ Ibid., P.36. See later discussion for how Norcross was able to find a site for his residency in Igwumale and its implications for the interactions between the Idoma and Christianity.

Norcross began with the two basic tasks of most missionaries in a new area or situation: visiting the people and studying the language of the people. Norcross in his report to the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society (PMMS) in 1926, was able to describe his work that was based at Igwumale as an 'amazing advance' This was how he put it,

Over an area covering some 2000 squares miles and more, with an established population of a figure approximating to 100,000, what stark paganism! A pall of darkness hangs. And we are here to break forth with that ward for the driving away of darkness, and the spoiling of superstition, the Word that will make for the dawning of a new day of truth and light and goodness.

In thirteen places the gospel is being preached to this glorious end, and in ten village schools ten score (200) Okpoto boys are acquiring the beginning of an education that in its outworkings will spell so much change from the present day of chaos and blind groping.... Never was first promised brighter than it is in Okpoto.

There are many difficulties, but, ...having been called, the church cannot fail. An audacious faith, a sanctified will and, above all else, remembering that redeeming love is for men of every clime, will match us for this great venture. The way opens up. 'Forward' be our watchward.³⁵

We are aware of the fact that Norcross intended this report for the benefit of the members of his home church and the missionary organisation that supported his work with a possible aim or result of attracting material aid for the work in Idoma land. It must however be stated, that the descriptions attributed to the Idoma people in his report did not represent either the Idoma people or their situation at that time or previously. Our earlier discussions in chapter two on the Idoma social, economic, political and religious structures and organisations prior to their making contact with Christianity, differs considerably from the view put forward by Norcross.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 37

³⁵ Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, Primitive Methodist Missionary, Society *Annual Report*, 1926.

From here on the work in Idoma was largely shared between Rev. Norcross and Rev. Hutchinson and others which will be explored in a later chapter on the spread of Christianity in Idoma..

4.4. Other Missionary Bodies

Although, the main focus of this chapter is selectively on the Methodist missionaries, it is important at this point to note that the Methodist missionaries were not the only mission agencies that made contact with the Idoma. Let us briefly examine other missionaries or mission bodies that had early contact with the Idoma.

4. 4. 1. The Roman Catholic Mission

One of the fears of the Methodist missionaries of other mission agencies getting into Idoma land as earlier discussed³⁶ materialised when in 1926 the Roman Catholic Mission made contact with Idoma, when they opened a school in Igwumale³⁷. Their main mission residence was opened in Utonkon in 1931³⁸ from where they spread to other parts of Idoma land. The focus of their mission at that period was not on the Idoma people, but the non Idoma communities working with the railway. They directed their efforts mostly on making contact through schools, which they set up in direct opposition to the Methodists. By 1930/1 the Roman Catholic Mission had broken the monopoly which the

³⁶ See earlier discussion on p. 124.

³⁷ L. Fuller (ed.), *Rescue The Trophies*, p. 30

³⁸ Ibid.

Methodist Church had until that date enjoyed³⁹. Writing in 1930, Hutchinson said, “R.C.M have been making strong attempts to get a foothold in Idoma. In every legitimate way we have endeavoured to prevent the threatened overlapping and proseletising (sic). Up to the present we have been successful”⁴⁰. But towards the end of 1931, Hutchinson could only make limited claim for the Methodist missionaries when he wrote, “...a chain of causes enriching Idoma with the exception of the south west corner, held by the RCs”⁴¹. The Catholics are strong today in Edumoga, Akpa, and Agatu and in Ochekwu. The Roman Catholic missionaries were preferred in many parts of Idoma to the Methodist missionaries due to their favourable stance on the Idoma primal religion, culture and other practices such as polygamy and drinking of alcohol⁴².

The relationship between the Catholics and the Methodist missionaries at that period was more “of a bitter competition than that of brotherly co-operation”⁴³. Unfortunately, this has remained largely the case up to the present

4. 4. 2 The Christian Mission in Many Lands (CMML)

The Rev. Raymond T. Dibble was said to have come to Umalici near Enugba in Agatu district of Benue State in the current Agatu local Government Area in 1921⁴⁴, although, this claim could not be substantiated, either through oral or written history. By 1950, a group of missionaries opted out of the Christian Mission in Many Lands (CMML) to

³⁹ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 92.

⁴⁰ Hutchinson Journal 26th May 1930 p. 5

⁴¹ Norcross Journal. P. 15

⁴² P. Mark, *Missions, Idoma Division* AR/ Otkp/ Misc/10 1927

⁴³ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 9, See also M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 92.

⁴⁴ L. Fuller (ed.,) 1995:31

work with the Steward Publishing Company. They soon started a church which was called, and still referred to today as Steward Company. Their churches are mostly found in the Agatu Local Government area⁴⁵. Currently there is a split in this church, and a new church called Christian Evangelical Fellowship Church of Nigeria (CEFN) was born out of this crisis. Despite this split, they have not been able to spread to other parts of Idoma. They are mostly limited to Agatu Local Government Area. They have no schools or medical institutions.

4. 4. 3 The Church Missionary Society (CMS)

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) later came to Idomaland in the 1930s, and settled in Otukpo, the capital of Idoma land⁴⁶. They planted five churches along the railway line. But by an agreement in 1932 they handed over their churches to the Methodists the most important being St Peter's in Otukpo and withdrew from Idoma⁴⁷. Their reasons for doing this were given by Chetwynd as an "attempt by Protestant missionary societies to avoid overlapping, and ... to prevent African Christians from inheriting the rivalries which bedeviled church life in Europe, especially since the reformation"⁴⁸. However, in 1978, the CMS came back, as the result of the internal conflict that had arisen in the Methodist Church Nigeria over the 1976 constitution of the Church⁴⁹. They have since grown in Idoma with several churches, and two primary schools. The Anglican Diocese of Otukpo was created in 1994, with the Bishop's see in Otukpo.

⁴⁵ Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue, *Archives* Other missions Ar/MCN/BD/1-9

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

4. 4. 4 Other Denominations

While the 1960s onward marked the coming of the Baptist and the Aladura churches, the 1980s marked the coming of the Deeper Life Bible Church⁵⁰. “The 1990s witnessed the springing up of many Pentecostal churches with one-man president-and founders all over Idoma land”⁵¹. However, the bulk of the Christian witness in Idoma was done by the Methodists.

4. 5 Settlement and the Language Problem

Following the reports of the first deputation to survey Idoma, and the subsequent two journeys made by the Rev. Finlay⁵², the Rev. Norcross and his Igbo assistant Mr. Albert Nwosu took up residency in Igwumale in September 1924⁵³. After some initial difficulties of where to live, they were able to adequately settle well in Igwumale. According to Familusi, this was probably due to the fact that they came from a mission, The Primitive Methodist Missionary Society that was already well established in the eastern part of Nigeria⁵⁴ which may have given them training in settling into an African society. Secondly, Norcross had a Nigerian worker Mr. Albert Nwosu as his interpreter. However, there were still problems with regard to a location in Idoma to take up residence, and how to communicate with the Idoma people directly. We will focus our attention on two of these problems, namely: settlement and language that are relevant to our discussions.

⁴⁸ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue *Archives*, Other Missions AR/MCN/BD/ 1-9

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Advance*, April, 1927 p. 112

⁵³ Norcross, “A Term in Igwumale”, *Advance*, April 1927.

⁵⁴ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 88.

4. 5. 1 Settlement

In their attempt to settle in Igwumale, the missionaries had to find a site that was suitable to their taste. The only site among many which was suitable to them was the site of the religious shrine of the people where their *Owuije* and *Akatakpa*⁵⁵ were located. Norcross chose this site, for their Mission residence and asked that these be relocated. Their choice created a lot of tensions and debates among the local people, as most of the people perceived, and rightly so, the missionary's choice as a direct attack on their primal religion and their sacred place of worship. After heated debates among the Igwumale people, the *Idoma* of Igwumale ruled that the sacred shrine of *Owuije* and *Akatakpa* be relocated for the missionary residence. Why was it the sacred site of the Igwumale people that was only suitable for the missionary residency? Whatever the missionary's reasons were for choosing the sacred site of the people for the mission residence were not immediately known. However, the action of the *Idoma* in relocating the sacred shrine of the people, although later regretted, not only demonstrated that the *Idoma* primal religion was tolerant of others, but the excellent goodwill of the *Idoma* to the missionaries. Norcross, however, seemed very pleased that the people's sacred shrine was relocated to make way for his residence. Reporting this later to his home church, he said,

Our first business was to find a site. Probably the best site in the District was secured. Incidentally, a town juju was located on that site. It spoke of the excellent goodwill of the people when in response to our wishes they located that shrine elsewhere.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See later discussions on this.

⁵⁶ Ibid..

⁵⁷ Norcross "A Term At Igwumale", *Advance* April 1927

While Norcross was right in reporting that the relocation of the shrine in Igwumale demonstrated the people's goodwill, his action, however, in insisting that the people's religious shrine be relocated for his residence he turned half of the community against Christianity, and it has remained so up to the time of this writing. The people saw his action and rightly so, as a direct confrontation with and attack on their religion and their sacred place of worship. In one of the writer's fieldwork investigations in Igwumale in July 1997, one of the most senior elders of Igwumale, Agbese, who was an eye witness to the events described was asked "ɔ̃di yá' éé n̄ē a kpó' ɔ̃ũ ce ɔ̃wɔ̃ico ɲ' m̄a? – Why did you not believe in God or become a Christian? He replied, *N kpó' ɔ̃ũ ce ɔ̃wɔ̃ico gbóoo, am̄an ɲ' n̄ le ɔ̃ũ ce ɔ̃wɔ̃ico ku Unɔ̃krɔ̃si n̄ē o wā I kpó' ɲ' t̄a Igwumalē, kle le ɲga elihɔ̃ kú alɔ̃ ca tũ aj̄e a ɲ'* – I believe in God, but I do not believe in the God of Norcross that came and waged war on the Igwumale people and their religion and their sacred place⁵⁸

Despite the fact that not all of the Igwumale people were happy with the relocation of their sacred place for mission settlement, Norcross certainly was, and viewed it as a mark of the missionary presence in Igwumale as indicated in his first term report of his work in Igwumale. This was what he said,

In company with the Rev Banham we first visited the town so that we might make known our desire to take up residence. Our proposals were made and our aims stated.... It was intimated that our desire would be granted and facilities given for the commencing of the mission. It is not all we might have wished but it is quite as much as we could expect. Confirmation of the people's goodwill showed itself by giving us permission to look about and choose our own site. We were soon trampling the towns' environs... the best site was secured. A town Juju that was located on the site we chose was relocated in response to our wishes.... Finding

⁵⁸ Agbese, *Field work interview*, Igwumale, 17th July 1997. Agbese's view would be representative of most of the Idoma people who rejected Christianity as they viewed its arrival in Idoma and the missionary's treatment of their indigenous religion as an attack of their religion and the community.

temporary residence with a teaching evangelist and his wife, we set out clearing our chosen site of scrub and bush over 100 yards square. This is a perspiring business; even though there be hundred pairs of willing hands to make the work light. After clearing, there are native materials to be accumulated, sticks for wall plate and ridge poles. Forked sticks were needed to support these and a thousand stick to make the framework for the roof, over which some hundred bundles of long grass will later be laid.... After two weeks our first mission house is put up in Okpoto (Idoma).... The house is not much to look at, nor can we expect a long life from it, but at least we now have mission premises. It is a sure mark that we are here.⁵⁹

We observed from this report that, even though Norcross was aware of the fact that his request for the relocation of the religious site of the Igwumale people for his residency would be greeted with some difficulty, he still went ahead with the request. Although, Norcross was happy and satisfied with his action, as later discussion will indicate, his choice did more harm than good to the relationship and the interaction that existed between the Idoma and Christianity.

4.5.2 Language

Now that the missionaries had settled in Idoma, they would have loved to have been able to communicate with the people directly, but they couldn't. Norcross acknowledged this painful fact of their inability to communicate with the Idoma, when he wrote,

On the door-step of the Mission so to speak, were 4,000 people. But we could not talk to them. That is the immediate problem of every missionary going new to his job. But here the missionary was going to a new tribe, a tribe which had no literature, was not conscious of anything in the shape of alphabet or grammar, or even writing. There were no books. That can be a staggering fact to people reading it in an article; it is much more staggering fact to the missionary who happens to be up against it in practice. So then, this all-important task of learning a new language, and an effort to write it down phonetically.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Norcross, "Extension in Nigeria Okpoto Settling In", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 15th Jan 1925, p. 44.

⁶⁰ Norcross, "How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to Writing", *Kingdom Overseas*, June 1933, p. 130.

Norcross and his team quickly and rightly realised the importance of the local language of the Idoma in any missionary work among them. He argued,

In pioneer work a missionary is called upon to put his hand to many difficult tasks, not the least obstacle to be surmounted being that of the local speech. Primarily our missionary is the custodian of something he desires to communicate. As long as he remembers that, he remains under the distinct urge to speak as the people speak, in order that his communication shall be direct.⁶¹

Norcross's view on the importance of the language of the indigenous people as a vehicle of rendering the gospel among those people, was representative of the general mission emphasis on the importance role of the indigenous language of the people in any effective mission work.⁶²

He further argued that, the main reason for learning and working at a new language and doing any translation work in that language is "ordained within the Gospel itself. The right of every man to hear the immortal story in his own tongue"⁶³.

Language work then became a very important priority to the missionaries in the very beginning of their work in Idoma, because they felt that it was the most powerful thing for the Idoma indigenous people. Rev Norcross believed that

...Out of all the counting factors which come within the scope of missionary endeavour, no single one has been anything like so important, or so potent for

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² For example, Alexander Fraser in his article, "Aims of African Education" in *International Review of Missions*, 1925, p. 516ff, argued that education "should be rooted in the vernacular... and the teachers must know the vernacular" if they are to be effective in teaching the Africans. Westermann, 1925, p. 27 argued on his part that "it is quite impossible for the Africans to grasp the full meaning of the Gospel and to make it his own spiritual property, if he is not taught it in his own language.... However well he may be acquainted with foreign idiom....".

⁶³ Norcross, *Learning a New language*, p.132

good, as that which makes it possible for sons and daughters of that land to turn to the story of the love of God, and read it for themselves⁶⁴.

With these strong convictions in mind Norcross and Albert with the help of Dibia⁶⁵ started learning the Idoma language. As nothing had been written in the language before, they only had to depend upon learning the spoken word. By repeating what they heard to the Idoma people, they noted carefully its effects upon the locals who listened to them. However, their experiences of the Igbo language were of great benefit to them. This enabled them in a measure to give some direction to their often repeated inquiry *enema wiyi ne* (sic) 'What is this'?⁶⁶ As they listened to the answers to their inquiry, they phonetically wrote them down, and hoped that they were correct answers. As it is in most translations into a new language, such answers could have meant so many things. For example, if they asked about an orange, the answer they could possibly get may have meant, a ripe fruit, an edible fruit, or a green or yellow fruit. Somehow their problem was even more compounded by inaccurate interpretation and the need for back translation for the missionary. Norcross himself noted this when he observed that more of their answers

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.133

⁶⁵ Dibia is said to be the first Idoma man from Igwumale who was very friendly with the missionaries, and helped Norcross in his work in Idoma, especially in the language area. During field work in Igwumale in July 1997 attempts were made to trace the identity of Dibia. This proved to be a very difficult exercise. While some felt he was an Efik-Idoma, others think of him as a Yala man. Yala is a tribal people in the present Adamawa state of Nigeria that are regarded by the Idoma as the Idoma sons who live in the bush. Others felt he was truly an Idoma man from Igwumale with no current existing relations in Igwumale due to the tribal wars that wiped out many tribes in Igwumale. However controversial his identity may be, the fact remains that he was very instrumental in helping the early missionaries in Idoma, with regards to the study of the Idoma language and interpretation.

would “come to them from Idoma into Ibo, Ibo into Efik, via Dibia to Albert the Catechist and Albert to myself”⁶⁷ This created the problem of accurate translation of what is being said, communicated, taught and learnt.

This problem stayed with them during the period of learning the Idoma language from the collection of Idoma vocabularies, to word formations, and sentence structures in the Idoma language. Despite their difficulties, they were able to record some partially correct Idoma vocabularies, and construct some phrases that enabled them to put together some elementary principles of the Idoma grammar.

After the first six months of language study, Norcross reported that “we ventured to begin the translation of St Mark’s Gospel, and during the following eighteen months, we travelled through that Gospel not less than five times”⁶⁸

Norcross, as observed in our discussion above, realised that although Idoma presented them with a fine opportunities for effective application of all phases of missionary endeavour, such as, evangelisation, educational activities and medical work, they could not talk to the people due to the language problem. This made the study of the local language the number one priority in their work in Idoma. A typical day in Igwumale as described by Haswell sums up the early priority that the missionaries placed on the Idoma Language.

⁶⁶ Norcross, “How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to writing”, *Kingdom Overseas*, June 1933, p. 133

⁶⁷ Norcross, “Learning a New Language”, June, 1933 *Kingdom Overseas* .p. 131.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

After breakfast we walk out to look for patients. Stroll round town. Most folk away at farms or hunting. A few at home, and among these find a few sick. Some difficulty in securing confidence, but when they see our genuine interest they allow us to help where possible. They are interested in our efforts to speak in their language. Pass on from here to farms on edge of town. Have previously memorised words for farm, yam, sun, and rain. We can ask, 'Are you well?' and reply to their similar enquiries in a most fluent manner. They are highly amused and compliment us on our progress.... Return to Mission House as sun becomes hot. Call two boys into study and work on Matthew's gospel and various little speeches and essays. Difficulty is to get pronunciation correct, and concentrate on this.... Rule of the house is that until noon only native tongue is to be spoken no English. ... We have to walk about... with little notebook in our hands.... Visit compound and talk with people. Have carefully noticed words for 'hunting', 'fine animal' and evening meal' etc., etc., and make the most of these. Our conversation must be rather monotonous! ... It is a grand day when we can make one's first speech in the church, even if it has to be prepared with pains for hours before!⁶⁹

Norcross and his team continued to work hard on learning the Idoma language. Their efforts seemed to have paid off, when in September 1927 they were able to publish the first Idoma primer, hymn book and St Mark's Gospel. Though no Idoma was able to read at that time, the translation work continued. A year later the Methodist catechism was translated from Ibo into Idoma by Albert Nwosu, and subsequent translations on the Gospel of Luke and later Acts were continued with Albert Nwosu playing a leading role⁷⁰.

Now that the missionaries had settled in Idoma, and were beginning to learn the local language, and even ventured to do a translation in the local language, what did they think of the Idoma people? What were their perceptions of the Idoma religion, past values and

⁶⁹ Haswell, *Primitive Methodist Missionary Report*, 1928, pp 39-40.

⁷⁰ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 6.

culture? What was the Idoma reaction and response to these missionary activities in Idoma?

4. 6 The Missionary Perception of the Idoma People

The early missionary images of the Idoma, their religion, past values and culture were very negative. The Idoma were described in the most derogative terms by the missionaries.⁷¹ To the missionaries, the Idoma lived in oppressed moral darkness. A people full of superstition, cruel, and murderers of children. They perceived the Idoma as insensitive, heartless, very brutal and indifferent to the sufferings of others and very oppressive⁷². Why were the missionaries so negative about the Idoma people? Were their negative feelings toward the Idoma people a carry over of the feelings that generally existed about Africans in the western world at that time, that which they transferred to the Idoma people or were their observations true to the Idoma situation of that time? How could they possibly be so negative about a people, they have not even known or studied properly? For example, Rev. Dodds after visiting the Idoma for the very first time described them as

a people struggling in the bonds of heathenism, more vile than anything we had seen in the early days in Bende (Ibo); a people of low mental power and blood red passion; a people utterly out of touch with all things noble and pure; a people wild and fierce among themselves.... A people who live so much to themselves as to be timid of Europeans and quite indifferent to any service we could render.⁷³

By and large, we suggest that the terminologies the missionaries used in describing the Idoma people as our later discussion will highlight, were carry over terminologies of the

⁷¹ See earlier discussion in p. 122ff

⁷² See for example, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, Call of Nigeria, 23rd November 1922.

social situations of the lower working class in their home country at that time that were imported into Idomaaland.

In one of Norcross's letters to his parents he said this of the Idoma, "our Okpotos are 'raw' native.... Clothes don't matter..."⁷⁴. Two years later, his negative view of the Idoma remained the same. He said, "the people are the laziest lot I've seen in the country"⁷⁵.

The missionaries had these unfortunate negative images or views of the Idoma among whom they have come to live and work. Hastings, writing about the missionary's image of Africa in general rightly puts it, "O the blindness, the darkness, the foolishness, of heathenism...."⁷⁶ Darkness is unquestionably a recurring note in the missionary image of the Idoma. To the missionaries that were in Idoma, they were in a dark continent waging an aggressive war with the power of darkness that had gripped the Idoma, possibly, with the words of the following song in mind "O'er heathen lands afar, Thick darkness broodeth yet; Arise O Morning Star, Arise and never set"⁷⁷.

As indicated earlier, these negative views the missionaries have of the Idoma people were the views they had developed from the social problems of the lower working class

⁷³ Rev. Dodds, "Peoples of the Mist", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *The Primitive Methodist Leader*, 17th April 1924, p.245.

⁷⁴ Norcross, "Sunday in Igwumale", *Advance* March 1926

⁷⁵ Norcross Diary Sept 3rd 1928, p.129.

⁷⁶ A. Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 299.

⁷⁷ Methodist Hymn Book, No 811, V. 6.

of their own people which, they simply transferred to the Idoma people.⁷⁸ The missionaries ideas of the Idoma at that period was the 19th century European general view of Africa. They felt at that period that Africa had no history, because the African history was not written down. This in our view is a mistake and wrong understanding of history which, is simply a story which is written down or not. They felt their western culture was superior to that of Africa and that they were culturally superior to the Africans. To them the Africans had nothing culturally worth talking about. These again are wrong views. The missionaries in our view refused to accept what they saw of the social structures, religious beliefs, and political structures of the African people. These missionaries simply dismissed them as Un-African. They felt such structures couldn't be possibly African. This again we view as nonsense.

Although, later discussions will critically evaluate and analyse the missionary's negative view of the Idoma, it is worth noting here that, as the missionaries gradually began to know the Idoma people, some of their negative views of the Idoma began to change. Rev. Dodds who was very negative about the Idoma people in the early stage of the missionary contact with them, six months later had this to say about the Idoma towns, the industrious nature of the Idoma people and their high level of intelligence. This was how he put it,

Their towns are neat and clean and abound in open spaces. Even the huts are spread well apart, which is not the case in the Ibo towns we saw..., the Okpotos seem highly industrious. Their particular habits and handicrafts are spinning and weaving of native cotton.... Observations told us that we had come to a Negro

⁷⁸ For details of this argument, see General William Boot, "Darkest England"

people of a distinctively high order, well worth the serious consideration of our Church⁷⁹

Although, himself, guilty of having the low image and negative views of the Idoma, Norcross soon realised that it was foolishness and short sightedness on the part of the missionaries to maintain such a low image of the Idoma and to fail to see any thing human in them. He stated,

There are those who mainly by reason of short sight, utter base things respecting the native, those who never see any "humanness" in him. How foolish, and how far from the mark is such low judgement! He may come from the bush and the swamp... he can be "impressed"⁸⁰

In one of the writer's fieldwork interviews with some ex-missionaries to Idoma, Rev. & Mrs. Wylie were asked, What were your perceptions of the Idoma people? Mr Wylie replied,

An elderly missionary teacher told us that, our 'servants' those we came to serve must be seen to show us respect and that we should not always trust the Idoma people. Many Idoma he said could not be trusted. He told us of some one came one night and stole paw-paw and grapes fruit off his trees. But I don't think it was anything to be excited about. Boys have always stolen or scrumpled apples at home anyway. How does he know it was students who took the fruit? These attitudes of looking down on the locals are contrary to the newness of the Gospel values. We were equally appalled by the fact that while, we the British ministers could get one new car, added to the fleet, per circuit per year, our sole Nigerian colleague had had his request for a car refused. This was wrong and far from the Gospel we were to preach. We are the experienced ones with all our know-how, while they (the Nigerians) are either not very bright or slightly more generously, 'they are trying'. We recalled comments made by our elderly missionaries, that the Idoma were less sensitive than whites. That they are quite happy living in a lot of noise and don't appreciate flowers or beautiful scenery. We frankly squirmed at these attitudes and comments and throughout our missionary service these 'old colonial' stances caused friction and embarrassment.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Rev. Dodds, "Peoples of the Mist", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *The Primitive Methodist Leader*, 17th April, 1924, p. 245.

⁸⁰ Norcross, "A Journey of Promise", Methodist Church in great Britain, *Advance*, July 1926, p. 122

⁸¹ Wylie, *Fieldwork interview* 26th March 1996. Rev. and Mrs. C. Wylie are current ministers of the Kirkbymoorside Circuit of the Methodist Church in York.

It could be briefly concluded here that, while the early missionary images of the Idoma were very negative, the later images were becoming more positive

4.7 The Missionary View of the Idoma Past Values and Culture.

The customs and social structures of the Idoma are the visible expressions of the Idoma underlying values and beliefs; and form their worldview⁸². Religion and culture are in most cases linked, and it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between the two, as Stephen Neill rightly argues,

There has never yet been a great religion, which did not find its expression in a great culture. There has never yet been a great culture, which did not have deep roots in a religion⁸³.

Therefore, for the Idoma to try to change from a set of religious beliefs and values will have big cultural implications for them, both as individuals and as groups. Had the missionaries been sympathetic to this feeling, the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity would have been more positive in Idoma. The missionaries should have created a way for Christian counter-culture to exemplify the values of Christianity within the particular Idoma societal cultural context, as it has been in other cultural context, such as the Greeks and the Romans⁸⁴

Rather, they developed in Idoma a dismissive and condemning attitude towards the Idoma, ignoring their past and their cultural values. They showed lack of respect for both private and communal property and the personal dignity of the Idoma. The following

⁸² See Chapter three on the Idoma Theology

⁸³ Cited in Brian Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, p. 170, Also our earlier discussion on the Idoma culture affirms this statement.

⁸⁴ For detail examples of this view, See Andrew Walls, "The Gospel, As The Prisoner And Liberator of Culture", *Missionalia* 10 (3) 1982, pp. 93-105

examples illustrate this point. As earlier discussed, on arrival in Igwumale in September 1924, Norcross was graciously offered any place of his choice as his residency in Igwumale. To the surprise of the Igwumale people, he decided to choose the sacred site of their worship of the *Owuije* $\propto \supset \eta$ ⁸⁵ for his residency. He insisted that the Igwumale's sacred site be relocated to make way for his residency. The $\supset c \acute{e} \acute{e} \acute{p} a$ ⁸⁶ overruled the Igwumale people who raised objection to Norcross's request, and relocated the sacred site as requested by Norcross. Although Norcross saw the action of the people as a demonstration of their goodwill, the majority of the locals understood his action as lack of respect for their cultural values and direct confrontation with the people and their religion⁸⁷.

Secondly, during field work in Ocobo in Ohimini Local Government Area of Benue State, the Agbo of Ocobo⁸⁸, Chief Owuna, who was an eye witness to the first missionary contact with Ocobo told the writer the following story:

⁸⁵ See earlier note on page 134

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See earlier discussion on page 135ff.

⁸⁸ The Agbo of Ocobo is both the religious and political leader of the Ocobo people. Agbo is the father of the Ocobo people. As result all men are traditionally greeted as Agbo, and the women as Ai-agbo – meaning children of Agbo. It is only the chief that can be addressed as The Agbo of Ocobo.

Eko nē ubekée wā ɔlé alɔa When the missionary came to our home/place
Ó má ɔdā uculo kù alɔ, ēnē he found our cultural sacred object which
O hi ɔka icēbɔ ku òndúajε he called the idols of the owner of the land
ēne o yɔ ɔnyēpa a which were at the cross roads
Ó lεuwá túbá, he gathered them
lε ɔlá wu uwá set fire on them
eko nē òndúajε gā ega nē when the owner of the land came to the place that
ɔdā uculo kù nu yɔ I yi ɔlá a the sacred objects of his religion were burning
Ó lεogwú gbo, εgba dē, Ibá dē he shout a war cry, shouted, and cry in anger
Ubekee' a da ɔka, the missionary told him
ɔlε okònu kù nu klá to close and shut up his mouth
Aman' ɔgēē je yi ɔlá If not, he would burn in the fire
Mla ɔdā uculo kù nu with his sacred objects
Eko nē òndúajε lε'égbe nē when the owner of the land saw the gun that
O playi acá ku ubekee' a má a was hanging on the shoulders of the missionary
Ó le yε ɔkwuɔkwu ga he gradually retreat backward to
ɔlé nū mal ɔū nōbī mal ɔnɔ his house with sorrow and pain
ɔlé'le hùtú The village was set in uproar⁸⁹

From this story, it is observed that when the missionary came to the writer's village in 1926, it was not a happy or comfortable time for the Ocobo community as the missionary

⁸⁹ Chief Owuna, The Agbo of Ocobo, *fieldwork interview*, Ocobo 19th August 1997

set on fire what he called “Idols” of the *Onduajε*⁹⁰ at cross roads. He viewed them as simply objects of no cultural value. Therefore, he gathered them, and set them on fire. When the *Ónduájε* objected to his action the missionary responded by warning and threatening him with a gun, or of being burnt with his idols in the fire. On seeing the gun that was hanging at the back of the missionary, the *Onduajε* had no choice but to retreat in pain to his home.

This story and many other similar stories of the missionary’s high-handedness with this highest degree of arrogance not only demonstrates the missionary’s complete lack of respect for the Idoma past values but took Christianity farther away from the Idoma. For example, in Ocobo the missionaries were chased out, and only returned after several years of a more careful approach, and with the bribe of a school for the village. The missionary’s tendency to treat everything primal in Idoma as either at worst harmful or at best valueless has not helped very much in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity.

The Idoma society and her culture are so different from anything the expatriate missionary was acquainted with, that without some special orientation or training, the missionary found himself clueless and resulted in condemning the Idoma culture and its practices. As indicated in our earlier discussion, the missionary’s unsympathetic attitude towards the Idoma people, their culture, religion and values probably stemmed from the 19th century missionary backgrounds in which the Europeans only perceived Africa as a dark continent, without race, religion, history and culture. These were what they

⁹⁰ Onduajε is the Idoma title for the owner or the custodian of the community land held in trust for the community. He also in consultation with the Agbo of Ocobo oversees and fixes the calendrical rituals of the Aje - Earth the mother god.

transferred to the Idoma people.⁹¹ Although, the missionaries to Idoma have contributed so much to secular and the religious life of the Idoma people as later discussion would highlight, some of their attitudes to Idoma past values and culture implied some insult to the genuine values, that were, and are, to be found within the authentic traditions of the Idoma people. Those Idoma values need to be appreciated. For Christianity to better interact with the Idoma, it must realise that the Idoma had her own past, and this must be respected. This respect involves a consciousness of the Idoma past, but sadly the missionaries fell down very much in this area.

As the Idoma past is to be respected, so are the Idoma values; these may be tribal, individual or religious or artistic varieties. For Christianity to efficiently and effectively interact with the Idoma, it must be communicated to the Idoma in the Idoma ways of expressing truth, such as sapiential proverbs, enigmatic sayings, mythical stories etc. These are the means whereby the Idoma traditional beliefs have been expressed and passed on. If a way of thinking like this had been found in expressing Christianity in Idoma, it would have made it more attractive to the people.

The lack of missionary respect for the Idoma past values and culture has led to the later problems of nationalistic feeling that has come into the church in Idoma. The Idoma people became very concerned with the values of being an Idoma. This was so because, too much of the early missionary or expatriate attitudes towards the Idoma have

⁹¹ See earlier discussion on p. 143 ff.

expressed something of the inferiority of the locals. "Enclavement"⁹² became the missionary approach and mission policy in Idoma. This policy advocated that the Idoma converts adapt European names, habits and tastes. Approaches such as this, as Lamin Sanneh convincingly argued "ruptured tribal bonds of solidarity and reciprocity and induced dependence on foreign customs and manners"⁹³. As later discussion will indicate the Idoma were no longer prepared to bear this imputation of inferiority. To be an Idoma is not either to be European or second best. All these sentiments would not have come had the missionaries respected the past values of the Idoma tradition and culture.

4. 8 Idoma Religious Beliefs and Practice

It has been a long standing plea in Idoma for missionaries to be more oriented to the religion of the Idoma and then interpret Christianity in the light of what the Idoma people know. The alien character of Christianity was largely responsible for the continued parochial look of Christianity in some districts of Idoma. Hayford is probably right when he argues that

...What a different state of things would prevail if the missionaries had first studied the religious system of the native before trying to improve it, or which is worse, before introducing a new one⁹⁴.

But unfortunately, the early missionaries to Idoma had not taken any trouble to understand any other religious system but their own which had to be accepted by the Idoma. This has presented the Idoma Christian today with the double problem of not

⁹² Enclavement was first used by Lamin Sanneh in his paper, "The Yogi and the Commissar; Christian Mission and the African Response", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January 1991, 2-11

⁹³ Ibid., p. 4.

wholly understanding Christianity or his primal religion. The church will help the Idoma better, if it understands the former, and it speaks with authority about the latter. Isichei is right in her observation when she said,

There is an underlying problem, which greatly complicated relationship between foreign missionaries and African Christians, and it lies in the question: are traditional divinities an illusion, or are they real, but evil? To the nineteenth century missionaries, the spirits of traditional religion were very often real demons. To...Africanists, this is a good example of White racism....⁹⁵

The early missionaries to Idoma did not take the Idoma perception of the spiritual world seriously. They just condemned it as ignorance, hallucination, illusion and evil. Just as Wylie puts it

We were encouraged to view the Idoma traditional religion in a dismissive way. The attitude of the Church as a whole was that the traditional religion practised by the majority of the people was crude, ignorant and evil. The religion is poor and unsophisticated and rooted in superstition and fear.⁹⁶

This lack of understanding of the African spiritual worldview has brought a lot of friction between Christianity and the Idoma. Just as Mrs. Pearce, puts it, "The missionaries thought they had to take their western culture and way of doing things as well as God's love to Idoma. This is wrong, and would never work in Idoma"⁹⁷.

As the missionaries failed to understand the Idoma religion, condemned it, and insisted that the Idoma replaced it with their own new Christianity, a state of tension was created

⁹⁴ Cited in H. W. Mobley, *The Ghanaian's Image of the Missionaries*, 1970, p.103.

⁹⁵ E. Isichei, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Wylie, Fieldwork Interview in Kirkymoorside York, 26th March 1996,

⁹⁷ Mrs. D Pearce, Fieldwork Interview 10th May 1997. Doreen and Wilf Pearce were missionaries in Idoma. They served in Otukpo and in Iga Okpay circuits. They are the current ministers of Sutton Coldfield Methodist Church, South Parade, Sutton Coldfield in West Midlands.

between Christianity and the Idoma people, whose lives lie in their traditional religion and their cultural practices. What were the Idoma reactions to all of these missionary activities and perceptions of the Idoma people, culture, past values and religion?

4. 9. The Early Idoma Reaction

As earlier observed⁹⁸ the first direct contacts between the Idoma and the Methodist missionaries took place in September 1924. This was during an expedition to explore possible sites for future mission advance, and to minister to some Igbo railway workers who had earlier made contact with Christianity in the eastern region of Nigeria, and were at that period working on the laying of railway tracks among the Idoma. The Revs. Banham, Dodds and Finlay, who were accompanied by an Igbo man Albert Nwosu reached Igwumale at that time in the area between Agila, Ijigban, Izee and Ebia. Although, Christianity had made contact with the Idoma through the Igbo railway workers prior to the missionary visit, it was the Norcross and Albet Nwosu's visit to Igwumale on the 16th September 1924 that initiated permanent contact between the Idoma and Christianity⁹⁹.

The missionary attitude to the Idoma was fairly clear, as typified by Norcross writing to his home Church, "the Idoma are in darkness and deeply superstitious, and without any form of civilised religion. They are crude and ignorant"¹⁰⁰. Therefore, they had to win them.

⁹⁸ See discussion on pages 121ff

⁹⁹ Norcross Journal, p. 1&2

¹⁰⁰ Norcross, "The Call of Nigeria", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 1924

The Idoma attitude towards the missionaries on the other hand was much less clear cut.

There are several reasons for this. The first was the Idoma uncertainty about the precise nature of what the Methodist missionaries had to offer, due in large measure to the way in which the gospel was brought to them, especially, when the Idoma at the very early stage of their contact with the missionaries had to relocate their sacred shrine for the missionary residence¹⁰¹. The second was the internal division among the Idoma themselves as to what to do with the missionaries, just as Agbese confirmed in his reply, when asked what the Igwumale people did with the first missionaries that came to them. He said,

<i>Alɔ I jé' aful'eyi ń'</i>	we didn't know at first
<i>ɔdā nē alɔ gee yá' mla aubekeé a ń'</i>	what to do with the missionaries
<i>Acé òhì ka alɔ ka ɔ mi'ε uwa'</i>	Some people said we should accept them
<i>A'ha' ka alɔ kɔ lε uwa' kpó'</i>	Others said, take them
<i>nmò la ɛi'</i>	sacrifice them to the shrine
<i>Uwá we ucɔ nε</i>	They are abominations and bad omens
<i>Ma ɔdā nē e yá' ɔdā uculo kú alɔ a</i>	see what they did to our shrine and cultural sacred place
<i>ɔdan ń' ka alɔ I kē mi'ε uwa ń'</i>	If we did not receive them
<i>alɔ I kē gaa lε in'kpá ń'</i>	we will not have school
<i>aful'eyi a lε ɔ nɔ n'ēhi</i>	at first, it was very hard
<i>ama ń' alɔ kē mi'ε uwa' kpɔ'</i>	still, we did receive them ¹⁰²

From this account it appears that the Idoma were divided on what to do with the missionaries, while some felt that they should be received, others saw them only as

¹⁰⁰ Norcross, "The Call of Nigeria", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 1924

¹⁰¹ See earlier discussion on pages 135ff

objects to be sacrificed at the shrine. This was largely due to the treatment that the missionaries meted out to the sacred place of the people. However, they were received for the purpose of providing school only.

4.9.1 Idoma Response

The initial Idoma response to these contacts appeared to the Methodist missionaries at least to be favourable. While it is also true that some early reactions pointed to some division among the Idoma about the wisdom of relocating the *Owuije* and the sacred shrine for the missionary residency. The fact still remains however, that the missionaries were received, and those contacts with the Idoma increased as time went by. According to Mark Abo, the first message of friendship was acknowledged with gifts of a chicken, plantain, three yams and a keg of palm wine to Rev Norcross from the *Ɔɛpaof* Igwumale¹⁰³.

It is however important to recognise or note at the outset that the Idoma and missionary expectations arising from their mutual contact were quite different. While the main concerns of the missionaries at that period were the presentation of Christianity and 'civilisation', the Idoma on their part saw the missionaries as providers of education through schools. They also saw the missionaries as those who would bring economic good fortune to the Idoma people.

¹⁰² Agbese, *Fieldwork interview*, Igwumale 29th July 1996. Agbese was one of the early converts in Igwumale. He also worked for the church as a sub Pastor. He sadly died immediately after this interview, at a probable age of 97.

The main basis of the Idoma response to Christianity at that time, and even now, may be said to have been the Idoma desire to retain those elements in their culture, which the Idoma regarded as basic to them, and to reject those parts of the Christian message which threatened their cultural supremacy, and to be willing to adapt those parts of the Christian message which the Idoma saw as strengthening that cultural supremacy.¹⁰⁴ An approach like this would help explain the differing attitudes of the Idoma people toward the missionaries and Christianity within the Idoma cultural structure and the differing Idoma approach to individual parts of the Christian message, for example preaching and schools. Although, the Idoma reaction to Christianity was initially conditioned by economic and educational factors, there was also a religious element to it¹⁰⁵. Although the missionaries were harshly unsympathetic to the Idoma religious beliefs, they admitted that the Idoma had a distinct idea of a Supreme Being, which can be seen in the Idoma distinct name of *ɔwɔico* – God.

The Idoma were already looking for missionaries, before the first missionary contact took place. In his article, “The Call of Nigeria”, Rev Banham reported that,

Already we have heard of them searching for a missionary to open churches and schools in the country so that we are fully aware that they are no longer inert or indifferent to these matters but have themselves tried to take action. This of itself is eloquent of the opportunity which lies open to us in this field. Every one knows that the place to begin work where the people are anxious for your presence is far easier and more likely to yield a quicker result than when one is obliged to go amongst people who not entirely are partially indifferent to your approaches. Here one has to create a demand in the hearts and minds of the people for the good things he had to offer.... These people who are anxious for missionary work will

¹⁰³ Mark Abo, *Fieldwork interview*, Igwumale, 29th July 1997

¹⁰⁴ See later discussion in Chapter seven.

¹⁰⁵ See earlier discussion in chapter three on the Idoma primal theology

not rest content in this present condition of wanting and waiting. They will seek out other ways and means to satisfy their desires¹⁰⁶.

Even though the missionaries were aware of the Idoma's prior preparedness to receive them, they were still anxious about a possible negative reception from the Idoma people.¹⁰⁷ But to their amazement they rather found the Idoma people, very warm, kind, friendly and generous in their reception. This was how Rev. Finlay reported this Idoma reception

We found these people of the midst, chiefs and headmen, were altogether in a different category, both in intelligence and deportment, from any other we met in the south. Clad in flowing garments from neck to heel, wearing caps in shape like those in the pictures of Henry VIII. Strung round with lengths of beads, their flesh even down to their finger nails was stained a not unpleasant red. They everywhere impressed us by their quick and warm interest in everything we had to say.... One pictures with delight the young Nduadu of Igwumale and his dignified senior Mjoko receiving us with ornate state in Igwumale.... Instead of our progress from town to town being through an atmosphere of suspicion and fear, it was all the other way about...everywhere we had but to state our errand and be treated with delight and royally entertained in such manner as the town could manage¹⁰⁸.

Telling one of such wonderful stories about the Idoma warm reception of the missionaries, Rev Dodds narrated an experience that was very profound to him. He said,

I remember Ndebe when we cycled out of this town. The chief was on his farm. Another old fellow was put forward to answer for him. He did not know us, and to our first questions gave us nothing but evasive replies. Seeing how the land lay, we told him that we were missionaries. No more than that, but at once danced around one another with excitement. Messengers went hot foot for the chief himself. On his speedy arrival he told us that he himself had been on the point of tramping 40 miles each way to see the District Officer, to discover what could be done about a school. This was one sample of our greeting everywhere¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ Rev. Banham "Call of Nigeria 2 Reasons for Extension", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader* 23/ 11/ 22, p. 152.

¹⁰⁷ See Rev. Dodds, "Peoples of the Mist", Methodist Church in Great Britain, *The Primitive Methodist Leader*, 17th April 1924, p. 245.

¹⁰⁸ Finlay, "Into the Big Blue in Nigeria", Methodist Church in Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Primitive Methodist Leader*, April, 1924.

¹⁰⁹ Rev Dodds, *Peoples*, p. 246.

This story clearly demonstrates the Idoma willingness to have the missionaries.

However, as we closely studied the continued relationship or the interaction between the Idoma and the missionaries, many questions came to mind as regard the real motives of the Idoma people in wanting the missionaries. For example for what purposes were they wanting missionaries? Was it for education and economic benefits as earlier observed or for the Christian message the missionaries had brought with them? It is important to note here that the Idoma interests in the missionaries were not entirely for the Christian message of the missionaries but for education.

The Idoma continued to be friendly to the missionaries and increased their confidence in mission and what the missionaries were doing, a fact noted by Haswell. He said, “one has been privileged to notice the continued friendliness of the Idoma people and an increase in their confidence in the mission work”¹¹⁰

Initially, the Idoma were naturally suspicious of missionaries, but this changed with time. Rev Norcross confirmed this when he reported, “Every place on the circuit has been visited several times, and one is impressed with the growing friendliness of the people, and their deepening appreciation of the work of the mission. I found them just a little suspicious at first of the strange white man, but now in every place I am received with great cordiality”¹²⁰

¹¹⁰ Haswell, May 17th 1927, in Norcross Dairy, p.38.

¹²⁰ Norcross Dairy, p. 41.

Although, the Idoma people were friendly and warm towards the missionaries, they remained withdrawn as far as conversion to Christianity and commitment to the church were concerned. After twelve months' labour and work among the Idoma, their response to Christianity still remained cautious. This however did not discourage the missionaries. Hutchinson made this point very clear when he said, "It has been a joyous privilege to work on this field during the past 12 months. The people generally have shown themselves friendly and hospitable and one could always sense a hearing for the word. Though no great mass movement to the church has taken place, it is evident on all hands that the work mission seeks to do is becoming more and more appreciated¹²¹.

However, when it came to the issue of schools, the Idoma were sometimes too agreeable. The reason for the great willingness and reception in terms of schools was a practical one. Hutchinson correctly noted it in 1930,

One feels however that the desire is very largely selfish, in that the demand is for schools only. This has been brought about very largely by the political Dept. adopting the policy of substituting Idomas for Hausas in court clerkships etc. Several boys who have passed through our schools now hold these positions. Boys and youths in other towns have noted this and wish to qualify for similar jobs. We would be glad to meet the demands in full, as we get a real chance for evangelical work in the towns through the schools¹²².

Norcross reported, "We say it with unspeakable joy. Wherever we have gone, the people have heard our words with much respect and a show of gladness"¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid., p 44.

¹²² Hutchinson 29th January 1931, Norcross Diary, p. 52.

¹²³ Norcross Diary, p. 113.

After living with the Idoma for two years, the wife of Rev. Norcross had this to say about those she was living among, "Idomas have always shown themselves friendly. For the two years' residence among them, their kindness, courtesy and curiosity regarding the doings of the missionary have been a surprising thing"¹²⁴.

But as time went on, the missionaries came to realise that the Idoma only wanted the material benefits such as education and some medical care that the missionaries brought, and not their message. For example, Norcross after having helped to stop the bleeding of a gun shot wound, and thereby saved the life of the man noted that this case and others "are bringing people to the mission, but I am afraid that at present they want only the physical benefits, but I always get the chance to speak the word to them."¹²⁵

We have examined in this chapter, the early missionary contacts with the Idoma, and how the missionaries perceived the Idoma people, their culture, past values and their religious views. It was observed that, although, the missionaries were very negative in their views at the early stage, and very unsympathetic to the Idoma culture and religious beliefs, they gradually became more positive as time went by and as they got to know more of the people. The Idoma people on their part despite all the missionaries' negative views of them, and the high-handed missionary approaches to their cultural values, were very receptive of the missionaries and friendly to them. However, such reception and friendliness were only aimed at the physical benefits and other economic good fortunes

¹²⁴ Mrs. W. Norcross, "Among the Women of Idoma", Methodist Church Great Britain, MMS Archives, *Advance* 1927.

¹²⁵ Norcross Diary, p. 126

they would gain from such friendly relationship with the missionaries. This, however, did not discourage the missionaries, who continued their work with the hope that the gospel would one-day take effect in Idoma. Let us now examine how the missionaries continued their work in Idoma.

CHAPTER 5.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN IDOMA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EDUCATION AS AN AGENCY FOR EVANGELISM

In presenting this chapter we will among other things be focusing on the use of education as an agency for evangelism, church planting and growth in Idoma. Apart from the descriptive accounts of what happened, there would be some critical evaluation and examination of the aims and methods of the missionary education in Idoma, and the messages that were passed on to the Idoma people and all its surrounding problems.

5.1 The Spread of Christianity in Idoma.

The whole programme of the Methodist missionaries in the spread of Christianity among the Idoma between 1924 to 1974 could be seen from the perspectives of holistic evangelism.¹ However, I wish to restrict my working definition of evangelism to the actual preaching of the gospel and planting of schools as an agency for evangelism, and establishment of churches. It will also take into account the religious instruction in schools, and general preparation of personnel for the mission work in Idoma. I also wish to include in my definition other programmes specifically designed to deepen the spiritual life of the church, widen the scope of the spiritual and material horizon of the indigenous members, such as New Life for All programme, visitation and evangelistic campaigns.

¹ Evangelism is the methods or techniques of reaching out to other people. Evangelism and evangelisation will be used interchangeably in this chapter. However, we will differentiate here that, while evangelism will be used to refer to the methods or techniques of reaching out, evangelisation is used to refer to a much wider process in which the Idoma in this case are said to be brought to the saving grace of Christ. For full details of a constructive understanding of evangelism, see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis Press, Maryknoll, 1991.

The spread of Christianity among the Idoma as Chetwynd rightly suggested could be divided into the following six phases: First, The pioneer stage of the work during 1924-1934. Second, 1934-1945 which was the period that the missionaries began to penetrate into Idoma "Deeper and Wider". The third phase was between 1945 – 1960 which was a beginning of a lot of new things in the life of the mission. The fourth phase was 1960 –1969. This was a period of difficult challenges and new situations. The fifth, 1970 –1974, was the period in which the missionaries began to work together with other Nigerian staff.² There will be discussion of these phases later in the chapter. We will add the current phase, 1974 –the present which could be described as a period of an indigenous effort and later developments. This will be examined in chapter seven.

Dividing African history into periods has been subjected to heated debates by various scholars of African history.³ For example, McGrath apart from advocating that African history should be developed to "resonate with present debates and aspirations" of African people argued for thematic classification of African history,⁴ while Jabez Ayo Langley is of the view that African history should be restructured to include not only the historical sites of African past, but "to re-examine the neglected aspects like the role of individual in history",⁵ Jack Thompson called for the need to see African history "from a new perspective other than the western ones".⁶

² See I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, 1973.

³ See the various scholarly contributions to this debate in *Re-thinking African History*, Simon McGrath et al., Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1997.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

Nevertheless, having thought very carefully about these debates, we have come to the conclusion that up to this point no better periodisation has emerged for the Idoma situation than that of Chetwynd's classification of the various phases of the spread of Christianity in Idoma.

In all of these phases, especially, those between 1924–1974 the missionaries used various strategies⁷ to spread the gospel among the Idoma. However, we will concentrate on two of these strategies: education and Bible translation. In our view these were central to the spread of Christianity and its later development among the Idoma. While this chapter will be focusing primarily on education as an agency of evangelism, the next chapter will be considering Bible translation.

At the same time that the Methodist missionaries were thinking of education in Idoma, the western missionary bodies were thinking on what to do with education in Africa. For example, the 1920s witnessed wide ranging and very long debates about African education. In his classic outline of these debates in his book *Christianity in Northern Malawi*, Jack Thompson identified the two major aspects that concerned the missionary bodies at that period. The first issue was the aims and methods of missionary education in Africa and the second was the role the relationship between the missionaries and the colonial administration played in the implementation of those aims and methods of the missionary education in Africa.⁸

⁷ Some of these strategies include visitation, Gospel campaigns; open choir parade rounds the Idoma village, the open procession with coffin at Christian burials, arts and crafts, and youth camps.

⁸ See T. Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, p. 239.

The first led to the visit of the Phelps-Stokes Commission to West and South Africa in the early 1920s and a second visit to East Africa in 1924.⁹ “The Phelps-Stokes Fund had been as a result of a legacy of Caroline Phelps Stokes a rich American spinster in 1910, concerned with ‘the education of negroes, both in Africa and the United States’”.¹⁰ Thomas Jesse Jones, who was the director of the Phelps-Stokes fund, and the chairman of the 1924 commission argued that, “western education was unsuitable for Africa and had to be adapted to African conditions”.¹¹ He felt that mission education should simply focus on five general objectives, which were “character, health, agriculture, skills, family life and recreation”.¹² Rev. J. W. C. Dougall who was the secretary of the 1924 commission on his part “pointed out that the commission thought that all missions were rather limited in their educational ideas and that the education provided by many of them was inadequate to the needs of Africa”.¹³ Both of these men felt that most of the mission education was too academic for the day to day life and needs of the Africans. They advocated mission education be tailored to the needs of the African village situations and the life of the Africans.

The 1920s educational controversy or debate involving the aims and methods of the mission education in Africa was also the central point of discussion in the 1926 Le Zoute conference of which the Scottish missionary Donald Fraser was chairman. This “conference was an endorsement of the Jones over-all vision of education”¹⁴ in Africa.¹⁵ Even though the educational debate of the 1920s on the aims and methods

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ K.J. King, *Pan Africanism and Education*, Oxford, 1971, 3 & 30, cited in T. Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, p. 239.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rev. J. W. C. Dougall, *personal interview*, cited in T Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, p. 299.

¹⁴ K. J. King, *Pan-Africanism*, 145, cited in T. Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, p. 249.

¹⁵ For further details about the whole educational controversy of the 1920s about the aims and methods of mission education in Africa, see T Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, especially chapter eight.

of African education is not the primary concern of this chapter, it is worth noting that, despite these concerns of the western missionary bodies on the purpose and techniques of mission education in Africa, the Methodist missionaries to Idoma at that period seemed to have failed to take these concerns into serious consideration in their policy of education as an agency for evangelism in Idoma as our later discussion in this chapter will highlight. The Idoma life, needs and village situation seemed left out in the educational programme of the Methodist missionaries to Idoma.

5. 2 Education: The School as an Agency for Evangelism

As part of the missionary strategy for the evangelisation of the Idoma, schools were established.¹⁶ The missionary aim in establishing schools in Idoma between 1924-1974 was to use them as grounds for recruitment of church members and also to raise well educated Idoma native assistants, who would eventually assist in the missionary work in the future.¹⁷ Norcross portrayed this aim in his report as follows,

If the question were to be addressed to our missionaries as to which they regarded as their most important task, they would probably answer the making of African missionaries. In such an answer it will be seen readily to widen the whole field of mission endeavour. Take an African and make him a Christian. African Christians are a worthy class. To take an African and put him to a life in which he will definitely set apart for teaching and evangelising other Africans means so much more. He requires to be educated and trained and wide terms these are. The very magnitude of the task confronting the Christian Church in Nigeria, let alone in Africa involves a direction and an endeavour along these lines. It were beyond the dreams of possibility even were it advisable even to send the European missionaries in sufficient numbers. The more economic way, the Christian way, is by the missionaries of this present age setting themselves to this all comprehensive duty of making African Christians. Mostly every society seeks to create an order of teachers and every teacher is a preacher¹⁸.

¹⁶ Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue, *Archives*, MCN /BD/ ED/ MS/ 1Education.

¹⁷ For further details, see, Norcross, "Native workers", *Advance*, September 1927, p. 166

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Norcross was of a strong belief that in educating Africans, and the Idoma in particular, they were producing teachers, preachers and missionaries who would spread the Gospel among their own people and that such a venture was better and economically more advantageous than the sending of an European missionary.

With these aims in mind, opening of schools became the number one or the higher priority than the actual preaching of the gospel in the missionary attempts to spread Christianity among the Idoma. Such a strategy, however, had its own set backs as Familusi correctly noted,

Whenever the Church engaged in some form of social work, the 'secular' activities absorbed more time and energy, and can even lead people to overlook the church's basic task, which is to proclaim the Good News of the salvation which Jesus won for mankind and to guide people in their spiritual growth. [He concluded], this happened to some extent with Methodist educational work in Idoma....¹⁹

Despite this, opening of schools at the early pioneer stage of the missionary work in Idoma continued without much difficulty with the exception of Otobi. According to Norcross, this is the only area that the missionaries encountered some difficulties when the attempt to open a school failed. He described the reasons for the failure as "robberies and wanton destruction"²⁰ of the school house. It is, however, argued that it was not completely true that this was the main reason why the programme for establishing a school in Otobi failed. It could be suggested that the main reason for the failure of the school programme in Otobi or the unresponsiveness of the Otobi people to the missionary and the mission work, was not completely as a result of 'robberies or wanton destruction' as Norcross claimed. It was probably due to language problems, lack of communication and understanding between the missionaries and the

¹⁹ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p.91. The writer adds the words in the square bracket.

²⁰ Norcross Journal, p.13.

local people. The Otobi people, though they could speak the Idoma language, had their own different distinct language called *Akpa*. The majority of the Otobi people then and even now would rather speak *Akpa* than the Idoma language. Therefore, whatever Norcross had to say to them at that period in Idoma or through the Idoma interpreters did not interest them. This lack of understanding one another also resulted in a high degree of distrust between them and the missionaries.²¹

This, however, did not put off the Methodist missionaries. They continued to establish schools as part of their missionary thrust in order “to provide means of Christian education, and thereby serve as preparatory and harvest grounds for church membership”²² The missionaries recognised the important role the school plays in the training of an individual for life in general. Norcross was of the strong view that it was important for all children to go to school not only for the development of mental powers and training for life, but for religious instruction and to be enabled to read for themselves the holy scriptures²³. Therefore, children of both sexes were encouraged to go to school from the age of seven, until the period of their confirmation into the full membership of the church.²⁴ Amu’s correct observation is his article “The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa” in *International Review of Missions*, is worth noting with regard to missionary use of education as an agency of evangelism. He said,

The first missionaries intended education to help Christianity forward; Christianity was the primary concern,...Christianity and literary education have, by this means come to be identified as one and the same thing....²⁵

²¹ During fieldwork in otobi on the 21st August 1997, Norcross’s claim of theft and wanton destruction were tested on the people, especially on one Mr. Eka, a retired Headteacher, a product of mission school, and one of the early converts from Otobi. Both Eka and others failed to confirm Norcross claim, except for the later reason of lack of understanding, which resulted in mistrust and suspicion between the Otobi people and the missionaries.

²² Otukpo Local Government, *Archives Education Report Otkp / LG / ED / Report /1.9*

²³ Norcross Journal, p 14.

²⁴ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocesan *Archives*, Missionary Education, 1 / 3

²⁵ E Amu “The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa” *International Review of Missions*, XXIX 1942, 479.

Right from the beginning, therefore, the school was seen or viewed as an agency for evangelisation, and everything was done to make the school pupils Christian²⁶. Within this framework, therefore, the school syllabus was designed in such a way as to give it a Christian focus. Teachers were given a very special training to equip them for the task of evangelism. Most pastors of the churches were selected from the teachers, while others played the roles of sub-pastors or catechists²⁷. On the whole, the schools were seen by the Idoma and the missionaries as a Christian community where Christian education was provided school pupils, and an indispensable part of the larger Christian community. As the schools were considered as Christian communities, the chief aim of education therefore, was the participation in the life of a Christian community. Grace Igwe, one of the early pioneer teachers in the Methodist education programme in Idoma, confirmed this view during a fieldwork interview with her in Hitchin on the 14th July 1998. When she was asked about the overall goal of the education programme of the Church in Idoma, she replied, "When we educate and train teachers, we do so for them to go and teach, preach, evangelise and live the Christian life in the community"²⁸. Norcross for his part felt that if the congregational and school life were not that of a Christian community, then the most useful class lessons on the Scripture would be wasted. He argued, "our school should become not mainly a place where lessons are taught, but where lives are lived. We should be happy then, if the children of our church grow up in schools, which are Christian communities."²⁹

²⁶ Some of these school pupils were already grown up adults. Therefore, it was not difficult for the missionaries to use them in establishing churches or a new church to be established from the school pupils.

²⁷ Otukpo Local Government, *Education Report*, Vol.1 1954.

²⁸ Grace Igwe, *Fieldwork Tape Interview*, Hitchin, 14th July 1998.

As Christian communities therefore, the work of the day in all the mission schools started with school assembly, which involved a period of worship. This worship included singing from the Methodist hymn book,³⁰ Bible reading,³¹ a short sermon followed with prayer and concluded with the Lord's prayer said by all at the assembly. The National anthem would then follow, and the national pledge³². The assembly and other business of the school were all conducted in English, which is the official language of the school.

Despite the strong emphasis that was placed on the importance of the Idoma language by the missionaries in any meaningful mission work in Idoma³³, at no point in the history of the Methodist education activities in Idoma were efforts made to use the Idoma language as a medium of education. The Idoma language was not even considered as a subject to be taught. Rather the writer recalled an experience as a child brought up in a Methodist school, where the use of the Idoma language was not only banned, but attracted some form of punishment, such as, cutting grass in the football field, or the fetching of firewood for the missionary or the headmaster.

As Fraser argued in his splendid article "Aims of African Education" in *International Review of Mission*, for education to be effective in Africa, such education "should be

²⁹ Norcross Journal, p 219.

³⁰ Later, some hymns were specifically selected and printed for schools from the Methodist hymn book. These collections of hymns were called Hymns for School.

³¹ Usually, this will be taken from the Revised Standard Version, copyrighted 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

³² This national pledge was introduced to the school by law as the government became very concerned that the school pupils were being indoctrinated with Christian beliefs and the missionary way of life at the expenses of national consciousness. At the end of the assembly, therefore, all school pupils are required by law to say the following pledge: I pledge to Nigeria my country, to faithful, loyal and honest, to defend her unity and uphold her honour and glory, so help me God.

³³ See earlier discussion in Chapter 4, p. 137-141.

rooted in the vernaculars... [he further argued] the teachers must know the vernacular, and be really interpreted in the life of the community from which the pupils spring".³⁴

The writer is in complete agreement with Professor Diedrich Westermann when he convincingly pointed out that,

Language and the mental life are so closely connected that any educational work which does not take into consideration the inseparable unity between African language and African thinking is based on false principles and must lead to an alienation of the individual from his own self, his past, his tradition, and his people. If the African is to keep and develop his own soul and is to become a separate personality, his education must not begin by inoculating him with foreign civilization, but it must implant respect for the indigenous racial life, it must teach him to love his country and tribe as gifts given by God which are to be purified and brought to full growth by the new divine life. One of these gifts is the vernacular, it is the vessel in which the whole national life is contained and through which it finds expression.³⁵

In addition to the school assembly, a day in a week, usually Wednesday, was set aside for full school worship. The pattern of the school worship would follow the normal Sunday adult pattern of worship, using mostly the order of worship contained in the 1935 Methodist Divine Worship³⁶. The school timetable included five lesson periods per week on religious instruction, and a weekly test on Bible memorisation. Three of the five religious lesson periods were used for Bible story lessons, one for Bible Memory work, which included learning passages from the Bible and hymns from the Methodist Hymn Book. The remaining lesson period was used for the weekly school service³⁷. The nature of the school timetable showed the emphasis the missionaries placed on religious education in Idoma. The Pastor or the Catechist would be asked by the missionaries to examine the pupils in religious instruction at least twice in a

³⁴ A.G. Fraser, "Aims of African Education" *International Review of Mission*, January 1925, p. 156.

³⁵ Diedrich Westermann, "The Place and Function of the Vernacular in African Education", *International Review of Mission*, January 1925.

³⁶ See *Divine Worship*, 1935, Methodist Publishing House, London.

³⁷ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ School Syllabus/Religious Education.

year in order to ensure that the prescribed lessons were properly taught by the school teachers, and correctly assimilated by the school pupils³⁸.

The school teachers were required to regularly attend church services as examples for the children. As part of the condition of their service put it, "All teachers must be Christians in full church fellowship of the Methodist church. The teacher must have his membership in the church in the place where he is serving".³⁹ And what is more, they were also subject to Church discipline and even dismissal, if they were found wanting spiritually. The teachers were placed under the complete control of the church by their terms of contract with the Church as follows:

The teachers shall be under the direction of the proprietor of the Methodist schools....In spiritual matters, the teacher is also subject to the discipline of the local consistory of the church and will be terminated without one months salary or lieu of notice if he is found wanting spiritually.⁴⁰

They were required to dress, talk and behave like the missionaries. They had no choice but to obey the instruction of the church without question.

The hold of the Church on schools was strengthened when it was decided that the circuit⁴¹ ministers should serve as inspectors and managers of schools that were in their circuits⁴². The ministers were also empowered to employ, discipline or even dismiss teachers. The headmasters of schools reported directly to the ministers. This

³⁸ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Minutes of Synod, 1925.

³⁹ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*. MCN/BD/ Conditions of Service For Teachers Serving in Methodist Schools, 1925

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ A Circuit of the Methodist Church is when one or more local churches come together under the Pastoral care of one or more Ministers. According to Methodist Church Nigeria Constitution, 1990, "a Circuit is a distinct authoritative unit, within the Diocese, in which usually several churches, conveniently situated for the purpose, are banded together for Pastoral oversight, mutual support and Christian Service". For further details, see p.73ff of The Methodist Church Nigeria *Constitution* 1990.

⁴² Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Education/ 1/5.

in my view placed the teachers under great stress in their attempt to please the church leaders in order to keep their jobs.

With the headmaster as the catechist of the local church, teachers as key players in the church, and ministers as schools inspectors and managers, the focus of the life of school was not in doubt. Pupils were prepared for baptism by staff; some so-called "Christian" names⁴³ were imposed on the school pupils who were prepared for baptism.

Confirmation into the full membership of the church became mandatory for pupils in senior school, i.e., primaries six and seven that were usually over 15 and 18 years of age then, and became one of the criteria for entrance into the secondary school.

Church attendance was compulsory for primaries six and seven, and Sunday school for primaries one to five. The school pupils would usually congregate in the school and march under the command and supervision of the school teacher in their school uniforms to the church. They would all be seated in a special place, and after the service, roll calls taken and then marched back to the school before dispersing to their various homes. The following Monday was usually not a very happy day for many of the pupils, especially those who were absent from the church service and the Sunday school, as the attendance at both the church service and the Sunday school would be scrupulously checked and all the absentees severely punished⁴⁴. Some children would

⁴³ For example, Abu would become Andrew or Oko become Peter. Ene would become Grace, while Onyiloko become Mary. Edo would become Simon. Some later reverted to their Idoma names. These names had remained with some till the time of this writing, but others reverted to their Idoma names.

⁴⁴ In most cases, the punishment will be left to the discretion of the teacher on duty or the Headmaster. But the punishment was usually caning or weeding a portion of a football field or school farm, or the missionaries' garden while others would be in class studying. A school prefect or the teacher on duty would closely supervise those serving the punishment. If it were discovered that the pupil serving the punishment was not putting the required effort into the weeding, the size of the original portion he was

therefore, attend the church only for the sake of avoiding heavy punishment on Monday. The wife of the missionary usually gave sweets to the children who faithfully attend Church services and Sunday school. It is worth noting the contrast here between coming to the services and the Sunday school, and absenting one's self from them. While not coming to the services and the Sunday school meant pain as result of caning, blistered hands as a result of hard labour, coming to the Church services and the Sunday school on the other hand meant a taste of English sweets which was a rare treat in Idoma.

It could be seen from the discussions so far, that schools were seen in Idoma as an important agency in the Church's evangelism. From the first day the children were enrolled in the mission school, till the day they left, systematic attempts were made by the missionaries to give them a Christian orientation and to make them members of the church. While the missionaries to some large extent were successful, as some of the pupils that went to the church remained as members of the church, in other instances they were not successful in using any of the Idoma pupils that passed through the mission schools as teachers or evangelists to their own Idoma people. This was noted by Albert Nwosu when leading a discussion at the Circuit Council meeting on the subject of the slow pace of church growth in Idoma as compared with the Eastern part of Nigeria. He said,

the most distressing thing of all was the indifference of the Idoma boys whom the school had educated. Having left school for positions in the local government departments they had become 'well off', bought several wives and become a bad influence among their own people. Very few boys had felt the call to devote their lives to the uplifting of their own people⁴⁵

given to weed would be increased. He may have to stay behind after the normal school hour to complete his punishment, while other pupils go home.

⁴⁵ Norcross Journal, p.38; also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p.17, and M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 98.

Albert Nwosu's observations in our view failed to take into consideration our earlier observation as to why the Idoma young men were interested in the school programme of the church. Their intention was never to be trained as evangelists to their own people, but, rather to work as court clerks and in other government offices instead of the Hausa boys, replacing them in such positions in Idoma.⁴⁶

It is equally important to note here that, the school system was largely responsible for the nominalism and lukewarmness now prevalent, in some of the churches in Idoma at the time of this writing. There is a large number of Idoma people who have been through missions schools, baptised in the various mission schools, and bear the so called "Christian" names, and therefore are assumed to be Christians, but are not active in the church, while others without pretence have broken any link with the church completely.

With the missionary policy of education as an agency for the spread of Christianity in Idoma, the work of spreading Christianity in Idoma took the following forms and phases:

5.2.1 The Early Stage 1924-1934

Prior to 1924, very little was known about Idoma. Idoma was believed to be an extension of Ibo land beyond Igwumale⁴⁷. After the exploration trip of the Revs. Banham, Dodds and Finlay in early 1924, it was discovered that the Idoma were different from the Igbo, and that no word of the gospel had reached them yet. They

⁴⁶ See earlier discussion in chapter 4, especially the section on the Idoma response.

⁴⁷ Norcross Journal, *Idoma Country*, p. 154.

dreamed of churches and schools in every village in the land, where now not one exists, of people in spiritual torment, fear of bodies racked with pain and knowing no sort of healing, of woman freed, set in her rightful place, of little children saved to live. There is no single Mission school or church in the whole area⁴⁸

By the middle of September 1924, Norcross and Albert Nwosu arrived in Igwumale, settled, and started a school. Three years later the school was officially “opened with fifty children on 9th January 1928, with Daniel Mba as headteacher”⁴⁹. The Igwumale people who responded to the missionaries’ opening of a school, hailed this, by going to the church services, resulting in the later opening of the Norcross church at Igwumale in 1928⁵⁰. It is worth noting at this point that, in naming this church in Igwumale as ‘Norcross Church’, the missionaries, perhaps, were only concerned with the memorial implications of such name. But this was later used as a point of resentment against the church, which the Idoma people saw as belonging to Norcross and not them.

The demand for schools increased in the 1930s, as the result of the Government’s decision to recruit and employ Idoma young men as court clerks instead of Hausa men. This resulted in the opening of schools and consequently churches in Otukpo Ico, Upu, Edikwu, Otukpo Nobi, and Ito in Igede in 1931⁵¹. An Igbo man Alfred Uche⁵² was appointed as teacher and catechist for this area. Later in the same year more schools were opened at Ijami in Oglewu district, Ugboju in Otukpo district, Iga

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Church Planting / 1/3

⁵¹ Norcross Diary, 157.

⁵² Alfred Uche was a railway points worker in Otobi. In 1931, he was found lying down reading a book by Albert Nwosu who at every railway station would asked if there was an educated man there whom they could appoint as a teacher. Alfred was asked to join the mission work. With the encouragement of the stationmaster, Alfred joined the mission work. And travelled with them immediately to Otukpo. For full details on the life of Alfred, see Igwe, 1998, *Men who gave their lives to God*, an unpublished manuscript.

Okpaya in Ochekwu district, Adumoko and Adumbeayi in Otukpa district⁵³.

Towards the end of 1931, the missionaries began to experience the feel good factor and understandably became very happy with the progress that was made. This feel good factor resulted in Norcross moving house and the mission headquarters from Igwumale to Otukpo the new political capital of Idoma in 1932⁵⁴, leaving Hutchinson to oversee the work in the Igwumale area. This was significant for the missionary work in Idoma, as Otukpo at that period had just been made the new capital of Idoma by the Government of the northern region.⁵⁵

1933 saw a very important development in the spread of Christianity in Idoma, which had a very valuable contribution to the interaction between Idoma and Christianity. This was the establishment of the first Circuit⁵⁶ Council, in which lay people were given some say in the running of the schools and the church in Idoma⁵⁷. It is noted that none of these lay men were Idoma, but Igbos. After nine years of missionary presence in Idoma, the Idoma were not involved in any way in the running of either the schools or the churches in Idoma. While some may argue that it was too early to involve the Idoma at that point, it is the view of the writer that they should have been involved from the onset of mission work in Idoma at certain level no matter how inexperienced they were by whatever missionary standard. Doing so would have averted the later problems of 1966 in which Idoma workers were needed to replace the Igbos who left Idoma because of the Nigerian civil war and the rush for the training of Idoma workers in 1974 to replace the missionaries who were finally

⁵³ See the Idoma 22 district map on page ix for the locations of these towns.

⁵⁴ Norcross Diary, p 158.

⁵⁵ Okwu, "Idomaland Under colonial Rule: 1900-1950", ABU, Zaria, Seminar, 1974.

⁵⁶ See earlier note on page 172.

leaving Idoma. Just as the Idoma *ita*⁵⁸-saying puts it, *eko ne eb'enyi we am̄am̄e a ne a gee k̄a'á* 'you can only coil fish when it is fresh, when you allow it to dry, any attempt to coil it will result in the fish breaking'. Early training and the involvement of indigenous people in any mission work in their locality are absolutely essential. If these are left too late, as in the Idoma case, they may create a very big problem of continuity, and a big danger of total collapse.

Secondly, even though progress was made in the areas of schools and church planting, the mass Idoma response, or commitment to Christianity was very limited. For example, Norcross's statistics showed that prior to 1931 5 people were baptised, 3 more in 1932, and 3 in 1933, making a total of only 11 Idoma people that were baptised after nine years of church planting through schools.⁵⁹

In January 1934, the first local preacher was commissioned in Idoma at the second Circuit Council meeting held in Otukpo. He was an Igbo man, Ephraim Omeiko of Taraku⁶⁰. However it was reported at this council meeting, that "four Idoma youth had applied but were advised to wait, since two of them were not even baptised, and none of them was a Full Member"⁶¹. In order for one of these applicants to raise enough money to pay his class fees and be accepted as a lay preacher, he had to sell his chicken to raise the money. During this period, lack of money or financial support from the mission office in London was becoming a gradual problem and hindrance to the work of the missionaries in Idoma. For example, the request by the Adoka

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ita is an Idoma proverb or saying.

⁵⁹ Norcross Journal, p. 158.

⁶⁰ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 10.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 10-11.

villages for schools and teachers was turned down due to lack of funds.⁶² Therefore, the commitment of such Idoma youth would certainly move Hutchinson, who prior to this incident had applied unsuccessfully to London for more funds for the mission work in Idoma.⁶³ This young man's situation became a perfect opportunity for him to emphasise his appeal for more funds for the Idoma work. He reported this young man's dedication to London office of the Methodist Missionary society in his quarterly report as follows

Last market one young Idoma who is eager to be a Local Preacher took a fowl-all he had- to sell so that he could raise a few pennies for his class money. With such a spirit abroad we carry on in high hope and confidence⁶⁴

It is pointed out that this case is not representative of the entire Idoma response or dedication to the gospel even though they remained friendly to the missionaries, and very agreeable to any move towards the establishment of schools in their villages. Their friendliness encouraged Hutchinson who by 1933 could claim that "Our work in this area is not now merely tolerated or looked on with some suspicion but is being recognised by all to be becoming a vital part of the life of the tribe".⁶⁵

It still remained unclear what Hutchinson meant by this claim of the mission work becoming vital to the Idoma cultural life, when there was a constant conflict between the Idoma culture and the educational programme of the church, as will be illustrated in our later discussion of the Igwumale conflict that resulted in the Idoma withdrawing their children from school and refusing to go to church.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., p. 10.

⁶³ Hutchinson Journal 1934.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p 11.

⁶⁵ Norcross Journal, p 17, also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 11.

5.2.2 Spreading 'Deeper and wider' 1934-1945

Although the next phase of the spread of Christianity in Idoma 1934 – 1945 had been described by Norcross as a period of penetrating Idoma, 'deeper and wider'⁶⁷, it was a period that witnessed some progress, some set backs and gospel - culture conflict.

In 1934 F. L. Lloyd, a man with a special interest in education, joined the work in Idoma. Norcross who strongly viewed education as an agency of evangelism in Idoma happily welcomed his joining the work in Idoma. However, such happy feelings did not last long. As Lloyd began to study the Idoma culture and traditions, he became fascinated with the polygamous life style of the Idoma. He soon began to suggest that the Idoma could still be Christians with their polygamous life style. Such ideas did not go down well with his missionary colleagues, who up to this point had taken a stand against polygamy. They viewed and preached against polygamy as sin. As a result of this, the polygamists were not accepted for baptism or confirmation. They were not allowed to hold any leadership role in the church. It was the missionary policy that only the first wife of a polygamous husband who applied for baptism and confirmation should be allowed to be baptised and confirmed, and only she could hold leadership position in the church⁶⁸. The men had a special bench at the back of the church because of their status as polygamists. There was great ill feeling and a sense of isolation among these men, more so that they had to sit in a place specially designated for them. They were not allowed to have any official say in the life of the church.

⁶⁶ See later discussion on page 183-184.

⁶⁷ Norcross Journal, p 18.

⁶⁸ Norcross Journal, p. 45.

The missionary stand created a lot of discrimination and hypocrisy in the church.

Some certainly felt discriminated against, as they were legally, culturally and properly married to their wives before they ever made contact with Christianity. Some of these polygamists who were adherent members of the church had to leave the church as they could not put up with the missionary stand on polygamy. Those who decided to stay became hypocrites because some men only registered one wife to enable them qualify for full membership, but still kept other women as wives in the traditional way.⁶⁹ It also created animosity among wives because as soon as they realised that one had been registered with the church, the others became very embittered.

This problem was dealt with when the missionaries later left Idoma land as chapter seven will highlight.⁷⁰ Lloyd at that period felt his colleagues were wrong in imposing their western culture of the so called “one man one wife” on the Idoma polygamous culture. He demonstrated his opposition by marrying three Idoma women.⁷¹ The London office of the Methodist missionary society was very unhappy with these marriages, which eventually, resulted in his been called home in 1939. The Idoma understandably, on their part were very happy with his decision to marry three Idoma girls. As a result, attendance at church services increased by 200%, but declined when Lloyd was recalled to Britain.⁷² Lloyd had two daughters by one of these women.

⁶⁹ Methodist Church Nigeia, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Church Membership/1/2.

⁷⁰ See chapter seven on Idoma Christianity Today.

⁷¹ All these women are dead now, but their children and grand children are in Otukpo, the capital of Idoma. Contacts were made with them during fieldwork in Otukpo, 20th August 1997. But, for some special reasons, the writer was not permitted to discuss the matter in details, or allowed to fully disclose their full identity in this writing. However, suffice to say at this point, that, one of these children is married to an Ex army Colonel in Otukpo, and she is also a teacher in a Methodist school. Their father left Nigeria for London when recalled home, but continued to support his children and wives in absentia.

⁷² Methodist church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, Missionary Personnel, MCN/BD/MP/1934-1945.

Another difficulty that held up the rapid spread of Christianity through schools in Idoma at this period was lack of finance. As Chetwynd pointed out,

During the 1930s the whole world was in the grip of an economic depression, and this naturally affected the amount of money available for missionary work. In Idoma it became more and more necessary for churches to support their own teachers, which they were often unwilling to do.⁷³

Chetwynd was not entirely right that the Idoma were not prepared to support their teachers. The cost of supporting the teacher at the period was a very expensive venture that was beyond the financial capabilities of the villages that were looking for teachers. For example, in a village where a young man will have to sell a "fowl – all he had...so that he could raise few pennies for his class money"⁷⁴ how do you expect people of such village to raise enough money to support a teacher? The writer is of the view that, although, the Idoma were willing to support a teacher, they just didn't have the financial capability to do so.

Despite these difficulties, the gospel continued to spread in Idoma, with the Igbo catechists such as Albert Nwosu, Zephaniah Unaigwe, Alfred Uche, Peter Agwu and Fred Enelama doing most of the pastoral work in Idoma⁷⁵. Fred Enelamah was however accepted as a candidate for the ministry in 1944, and left Idoma a year later to begin his training as a minister. The training of Fred Enelamah was a significant development not only for the spread of Christianity in Idoma but the whole of Eastern Region. His candidature for training for the ordained ministry of the Methodist Church marked the beginning of the process of the training of indigenous ministers.

⁷³ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Norcross Journal*, p 159.

The third difficulty that was responsible for the slow spread of the gospel in Idoma at this period was the movement of Albert Nwosu from Igwumale to Igede. After ten years of pastoral work in Igwumale, Albert Nwosu left Igwumale for Oju in Igede local government area⁷⁶ about 40 miles from Igwumale, to open up the place for Christ. There had been war in Igede in 1927⁷⁷. Albert built the mission house on the stumps of the soldiers' houses. He found the Igede people strange, and their language different from Idoma. As a result of this experience Albert, turned to God in prayer on the way forward. He prayed

O God, I am now in another strange land and as Thou hast touched the Heart of Agbani and Igwumale, so do with this people and turn their faces to Thy Cross, and Help me⁷⁸.

Albert Nwosu after this prayer settled down to learning the Igede language and when he had done so translated St. Mark into it. He also produced a primer and fifty hymns⁷⁹. While Albert Nwosu's move from Igwumale to Oju was a big gain for the Igede people in having such an experienced catechist to start the work of spreading the gospel in Igede, it was a huge loss for the Igwumale people among whom Nwosu first settled and worked and from there took the gospel to other parts of Idoma.

Chetwynd is correct in suggesting that even as late as 1941 "The church had little impression on the life of the town, where traditional religion was still very strong"⁸⁰.

He illustrated this view in the following story

In 1941 two Igwumale men, one pagan and Christian, stole yams. When the theft was discovered the whole village was called together, and everyone was to swear an oath on the ju-ju to prove his innocence. The Christians all refused to swear. The pagan thief later confessed to the crime, and he and his

⁷⁶ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 12.

⁷⁷ Otukpo Local Government Archives, *Oju 1920-1930*, p 9.

⁷⁸ Egemba Igwe, 1997, *Life Given to God*, p 10, unpublished manuscript.

⁷⁹ For details of Albert Nwosu's work in Igede and other parts of Idoma, see Norcross "Native Workers – A worker", *The Advance Magazine*, September 1927, p 166.

⁸⁰ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 13.

accomplice were both imprisoned. After this many of the Igwumale towns people refused to send their children to school. "If our children become Christian," they said, "they will be free to steal or commit any crime because there will be no oath to prevent them"⁸¹

Prior to the Idoma society making any contact with Christianity, it was a society that was and still is very concerned with issues of morality and the societal public order.

As discussed earlier, apart from using *eka*⁸² at the entrance of their sacred shrine as a prove of innocence, there were other bodies such as *ayi uta*⁸³ that see to the execution of moral justice.

From the story cited above, it appears that the Christians refused to subject themselves to this cultural practice. That brought a lot of concern among the people resulting in their deep suspicion of both the mission school and the church. Their suspicion was that, the more they send their children to school, the greater the probability of such children becoming Christians, which was the case at that time. As soon as their children became Christians, they would follow the footsteps of their predecessors, who would not subject themselves to religious cultural institution of the people such as *eka* the case in our discussion. They therefore, and rightly so, because of their concerns for morality and public order refused to send their children to school.⁸⁴

Instead of the missionaries closely studying this serious development, they came up with an attitude of the supremacy of one religious practice over the other. They sadly

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *eka* is the Idoma word for oath taking, See also chapter one for the bodies that were responsible for the discharge of moral justice in Idoma.

⁸³ *Ayi uta* is a traditional title for those elected by the community to see to the execution of moral justice in Idoma.

⁸⁴ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Education/1/1928.

failed to learn from this situation and presented Christianity as the only answer to the Idoma morality and public disorder problems. Chetwynd sadly argued,

But in the new, wider world which education, trade, railway and roads were bringing to Idoma, the universal religion of Christianity could provide a stronger and deeper morality than that of traditional religion and society. The thief stands condemned by the almighty God who created all things, not just by the spirits of one small village. And that almighty God also offers the thief forgiveness and the power to reform his life and become a useful man again⁸⁵.

This raises the whole question in our earlier chapter⁸⁶ of the missionary attitude towards the African world and past values. The missionary response to a big problem which divided the community, such as this, did not come as a surprise from missionaries; through whom, as Westermann, when discussing the aims of missionary education in Africa as a whole, rightly suggested, "Schools have been started, and mission work has been carried on without any consideration for the state of mind of those who were to be educated or evangelized"⁸⁷. This view can be applied to the Idoma position. In a like situation, even though the writer is not in agreement with John Colenso's use of the word 'heathen', his general advice on witnessing to others outside one's own culture would have been the appropriate response to the Igwumale situation. He said,

I believe that, by thus meeting the heathen, half way, as it were, upon the ground of our common humanity, and with the recollection that humanity is now blessed and redeemed in Christ....We may look for far greater success in missionary labours, and far more of stability in the converts that may be made, than by seeking to make all things new to them – to uproot altogether their old religion, scoffing at the things which they held most sacred, deriding the fears, which alone have stood to them, for so many years long, as the representatives of the spiritual world.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 13-14.

⁸⁶ See chapter four, p. 146-151.

⁸⁷ D. Westermann, "The Value of The African's Past", *International Review of Missions*, XXIX, p. 426.

⁸⁸ Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814-1883*, 1983, 45.

The Idoma as already indicated, after a period of initial enthusiasm, became disillusioned and demonstrated unwillingness to send their children to school. Despite this and other difficulties,⁸⁹ it was still reported,

The Church was spreading the gospel wider throughout Idoma, and, perhaps more important was helping it to penetrate deeper into the lives of individuals and of local society⁹⁰.

It may be partially true that the church was spreading to other parts of Idoma, for example, Albert Nwosu moved to Igede to start the work of spreading the gospel there. Also, some individuals may have opened up their lives to the Christian message, such as those who refused to subject themselves to *aka* - oath swearing in Igwumale. However, it would be an unsustainable argument to suggest that Christianity between 1933-1945 was penetrating the societal lives of the people as claimed by the missionaries. Rather, the people were beginning to turn their back not only on Christianity at this time, but even on the schools that they had willingly supported and accepted up to this point. The writer is of the view that Chetwynd's claim at the period in question was limited to a very small proportion of the Idoma people.

The gap between the missionaries and what they had to offer and the local people continued to widen. So much so that "the need for greater depth of understanding and fellowship led Amos Edwards⁹¹ to introduce a practice which he considered to be his most important contribution to the work in Idoma"⁹². This was to gather all teachers

⁸⁹ See earlier discussion on pages 180-182 of this chapter. Also see earlier discussion in chapter four on the Idoma response.

⁹⁰ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p.16.

⁹¹ Amos Edwards was an Igbo catechist that was working in Idoma at that period.

⁹² Norcross Journal, 162.

and catechists together once in a month on account days⁹³ for periods of Bible study and discussions on the problems facing the growth of Christianity in Idoma.

At one such meeting in 1944 Alfred Uche, an Igbo catechist, led a discussion on the twenty years progress of the mission work in Idoma since Norcross and others first visited Igwumale⁹⁴. The slow growth of Christianity was compared with the rapid growth of Christianity during the first twenty years of the mission work among the Igbo people. Three main reasons were given as to why the spread of Christianity in Idoma was slow. The first was “the unresponsiveness of the village people, who were unwilling to send their children to school or to give up their juju”⁹⁵. The reasons why the Idoma became hesitant in sending their children to school were earlier given. Fundamentally, these were the unwillingness of the new Idoma Christians in Igwumale to subject themselves to the general Idoma cultural practice of oath taking to prove innocence in the community, and the missionary insistence that the Idoma give up their primal religion, which the missionaries saw and described as juju⁹⁶, and argued for the supremacy of Christianity over traditional religious practice. Up to this point the Idoma had seen nothing in Christianity that would enable them to give up their beliefs. The situation was worsened by the confrontational attitude of both the missionaries and the local Christians towards the religious practices of the people.

⁹³ On these account days, all the offerings for the month from all the churches and schools were brought together, to be lodged in the Circuit account, from where money was centrally paid to the circuit staffs. Most circuits in Idoma still carry on with the practice started by Amos in 1944. However, while some view the gathering up of money centrally on account days as a good thing, as weaker churches were supported financial by the funds brought in by the more viable churches, others see this practice as lack of trust on the part of the missionaries on the local churches to manage their own church account.

⁹⁴ Norcross Journal, p. 162, see also I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p.17; M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 98.

⁹⁵ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 17.

The further reason was given as lack of leadership on the part of the Idoma young men who had passed through mission schools. It was recorded,

the most distressing thing of all was the indifference of the Idoma boys whom the school had educated. Having left school for positions in the local government departments they had become 'well off', bought several wives and become a bad influence among their own people. Very few boys felt the call to devote their lives to the uplifting of their own people.⁹⁷

It is natural for the missionaries to feel discouraged, when after twenty years of work in a given area, the progress was not what they anticipated, more so, when earlier experiences in another environment had given them much success and growth.

However, it should have been remembered when a conclusion such as the one cited above was stated, that right from the outset, the Idoma interest in the missionary and what he had to offer was on the economic side and not on the religious side. Secondly, their support for the education programme of the church was just for the purpose of enabling the Idoma youths to get the required qualification for government jobs such as clerks of the court instead of those posts being occupied by the Hausa boys⁹⁸.

Thirdly, Idoma had been a polygamous society, where a man could legally marry more than one wife. They saw nothing in Christianity at this point that was contrary to their cultural practice, apart from the imposition of the western culture of the so-called 'one man one wife'. Therefore, even those who had gone through mission schools had the problem of accepting this western culture. Although a later chapter will discuss this issue of polygamy in detail, it is important to state at this point that it is not true as reported above that the Idoma 'buy wives'. The Idoma marry wives, they do not buy them. Neither do the Idoma sell their daughters, but only accept bride price for their

⁹⁶ Earlier studies have sufficiently dealt with the errors of such terminologies, such as the one above and others. For detail discussions on this, see Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A definition*, SMC Press 1973, especially the Chapter on Errors of terminology.

⁹⁷ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p.17, also cited by M. M. Famulusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 98.

daughter's marriage. It was not part of Idoma culture to believe in or practise selling their daughters to men. This again demonstrates, the lack of understanding of both the missionaries and some of the Igbo catechists of the Idoma cultural marriage ceremonies.⁹⁹ It also appears that up to this point, the missionary emphasis on the work in Idoma had been on education to the detriment of the actual preaching of the gospel.

The fourth, and probably, the most credible reason that was given at this meeting which was responsible for the slow growth of the church in Idoma, was that "The Ibo teachers had difficulty learning the Idoma language and customs and because of low pay, were often more interested in cultivating their farms and trading than teaching"¹⁰⁰. Without understanding the language of the people, it is very difficult to effectively communicate the Gospel to those people. Language was and continues to be of extreme importance, both in the educational and evangelistic work in Idoma. As the Igbo catechists and the missionaries did not know the language of their field, they were like a man who "is standing behind a closed door, ... deprived of the most effective means of approach".¹⁰¹ Missionaries must be able not only to appreciate the educational and religious values hidden in the vernacular of the people among whom they work, but also to use them.

However, the missionaries must be credited at this point for not being content with what they had done, or giving up at that point and returning to Igboland and

⁹⁸ See earlier discussion in chapter four, p. 158.

⁹⁹ See earlier discussion in Chapter two, p. 53 ff, for full discussions on the Idoma marriage ceremonies.

¹⁰⁰ M. M. Famulusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 98-99.

¹⁰¹ Diedrich, Westernmann "The Value of the African Past" *International Review of Mission* XXIX, 428.

continuing their work in an area, where they had considerable success. But they continued to evaluate their work in Idoma from time to time and sought for the best ways to strengthen their work and move forward.

5.2.3 A New Day 1945 – 1960

Their determination to move forward took them to the next phase of their work during 1945-1960 which according to the missionaries was a period of 'A New Day'.¹⁰² This period was significant to the missionaries for three reasons. First it marked the period of expatriate missionary staff increase. Rev. Amos Edwards, Rev. Procter Dougdale and Rev Joe Wood joined the missionary staff in Idoma for a brief period. 1950 saw the arrival of Rev. T. K Johnston who remained in Idoma for the next twenty years. Second, this period marked the involvement of a Nigerian minister in the mission work in Idoma, when in 1952 Rev. Fred Enelamah¹⁰³ who was a catechist in Idoma, returned to Idoma as the first Nigerian minister to ever work in Idoma. Third, this year also witnessed for the first time, the full time involvement of an expatriate woman in the mission work in Idoma with the arrival of Miss Muriel Thomas in Otukpo for the opening of the women's Housecraft Centre. She remained in Otukpo until 1957, when Miss Marjorie Weeks¹⁰⁴ came to replace her. Miss Weeks spent ten years in Otukpo. Prior to this period, the emphasis of the missionary work in Idoma had been on the male. Only the men were sent to school, appointed as teachers and local church catechists. But during this period, with the special efforts of Miss Weeks

¹⁰² I. G. Chewynd, *Seed Time*, p. 18. See also our earlier discussion on the missionary's periodisation of African history in page 165 ff..

¹⁰³ Fred Enelamah, died few years before the writing of this thesis as the Bishop of Umuahia.

¹⁰⁴ Miss Weeks currently lives in High Wycombe, Bucks, UK. She is fondly remembered by the Idoma women for her campaign for women education, and her interest in the Idoma language, which we will later consider in our later discussion on Idoma Bible translation.

the education of women was being seriously thought of and the missionaries began to seek ways to reach the Idoma women through education.

Rev Tom Johnston, the longest serving missionary in Idoma came from Belfast to Otukpo in 1954, and remained in Idoma for the next twenty-eight years. Later in 1954 Rev. Jonathan David came to Otukpo to replace Rev Fred Enelamah who was transferred to the eastern part of Nigeria to serve among his own Igbo people. After one year, he too was replaced by Rev. H. Kelso¹⁰⁵ who also came from Belfast.

Rev. Tom Johnston, who had served in the British Army adopted two strategies to further enhance the growth and spread of Christianity in Idoma. One was his strong emphasis on visitation. Although, prior to Johnston's arrival visitation had been considered to be of great importance in reaching the people, it however, took more prominence at the time of Johnston, who would spend many days trekking from one Idoma village to the next. This was how he described one of such visits, which typified many more,

I went to one CRI school last Sunday, 50 miles away, and was the first minister ever to enter their village. I found it was not really one village as we thought, but a group of seven villages, each two or three miles apart. They had put up a mud building at a convenient centre and here the teacher we sent to them some months ago has to cope with over one hundred children. They all came for service and a few men also but not one women. They had no hymn books and knew no hymns, so we sang over and over again the choruses they had been taught: 'Follow follow, I would follow Jesus', and 'I have a saviour who's mighty to keep'. I read St. Luke chapter 15, and as simply as possible told them the gospel story. The children sat absolutely silent and motionless with their big eyes fixed on me. One would like to think they were absorbed in the message but it is more likely that they were petrified at what was for most of them their first sight of a white man at close quarters¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶ Norcross Diary, 163, also cited by I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 19.

It is observed that Johnston and the other ministers visited only the villages where the Igbo catechists had been posted either as teachers or catechists. Looking at this very closely, it raised the question of who actually evangelised the Idoma people? Was it the expatriate missionaries that brought the gospel to Idoma or the Igbo early Christians and catechists? Was the seed of the gospel planted in Idoma by the Igbo Christians before the missionaries came to water such seeds or were the missionaries the pioneers that took Christianity to the Idoma? The concluding chapter will examine this argument in detail and conclude that the seed of the gospel was planted in Idomaland before the expatriate missionaries made contact with the Idoma people. This view can be convincingly sustained by the pattern of events in Idoma. The spread of Christianity in Idoma seemed to follow a consistent pattern of sending an Igbo catechist into an Idoma village to start a school and church, then the expatriate minister would later make a visit. It may be correct to also suggest that there was hardly any situation in Idoma, in which the European missionaries ventured out on their own to evangelise the Idoma, without the advance party of the Igbo catechists. Johnston's observation as cited above, that these children were not taking in the gospel, is in our view right, due to the lack of understanding and communication between Johnston and those Idoma children. The likely thing that must have caught the attention of those children was the sight of some one outside their cultural setting and background with a different language, colour of skin, hair and eyes and a strange outfit. All these would naturally attract the Idoma children.

Johnston quickly saw the need of posting ministers outside Otukpo, the mission headquarters. While Rev. T. K. Johnson¹⁰⁷ was posted to Igede, Rev. Leslie Dawson

¹⁰⁷ Rev & Mrs. T. K. Johnson reside currently in Newcastle upon Tyne, and still serve as a supernumerary minister in the Newcastle Circuit.

was posted to Iga Okpaya in Ochekwu District of Apa Local Government Area. Rev. Dawson sadly had to return to England due to ill health, and was replaced by Rev. Alan Skipsey. Rev Herbert Kelso was stationed in Odoba. With these postings, the mission work was fully represented in the four corners of Idoma from north to south, east to west.

Another significant contribution by Johnston to the speedy growth of the church in Idoma at this period was the organisation of evangelistic campaigns and open air services which concluded with an open parade¹⁰⁸ around the village. Various evangelistic campaigns were held at this period, but the one that best illustrates our point was the one that was organised by Miss Thomas in 1957 in Otukpo led by some tutors from The Methodist College at Uzakoli in Eastern Nigeria, which ended on Easter Sunday with an open air service for all the Methodist churches in and around Otukpo, with an estimated attendance of over one thousand eight hundred people.¹⁰⁹

Afterwards, Tom Johnston reported,

The whole congregation formed into a procession to have a march of witness through the main streets of the town. It was led by a Local Preacher carrying high an empty cross. Then came the ministers, followed by the choir in their white robes singing 'Christ the Lord is risen today' so that the whole town was aware that for Christians it was a very special occasion¹¹⁰

A parade of this nature was completely new to the Idoma people and bound to attract a lot of attention. It became a popular means of gathering people, especially children

¹⁰⁸ Parades were very special and meant much to Johnston for probably, two main reasons, first as ex - British Army and secondly, from his home cultural background in Belfast where parades are central to his cultural up-bringing.

¹⁰⁹ Reverend T. A Johnstone's Journal, 1957, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

for Christian meetings. Johnston and the rest of the ministers maximised the use of campaigns and parades to spread Christianity in Idoma¹¹¹.

In 1959 the American evangelist Billy Graham visited Enugu in the current Enugu State, about two hundred and four kilometres from Otukpo. Johnson encouraged all the missionary staff in Idoma to attend. Follow up campaigns were later organised in Idoma for the purpose of evangelising the people. Chetwynd reported that, "In all these campaigns men and women were led to accept Jesus as their Saviour. Many jujus were burnt, and many people began on the road to Baptism and Full Membership of the Church".¹¹² In 1957 Johnston recorded in his journal an experience that was very special to him in one of such baptismal service, which was also the first Baptism of forty-three Idoma boys from the Native Authority Boarding School¹¹³ in Otobi¹¹⁴

The Church could not hold all who came that morning, and we had to conduct the first part of the service under the shade of some trees in the church compound. Then we formed into a procession and singing 'onward Christian Soldiers' marched through the village to the river. Here we continued the service, with the congregation on the banks, now augmented by many of the heathen people of the village who came to see what was happening. The boys publicly made their promise to be faithful followers of Christ, and one by one they stepped into the water and were baptised by immersion.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ For example, the use of parades was later extended to the burial ceremonies of Christians in which, the church carpenter will build a coffin, and the corpe placed inside, and covered with white cloth, and a brocade of flower placed on the coffin. The coffin will then be carried shoulder high by about four or five people. The ministers will march in front of the coffin, followed by the church choir in their white robes, and the rest. He will be paraded round the town with choruses and hymns to the grave site where he will be buried, with the cross at the centre of the grave. While others were attracted by such practices to Christianity, some viewed such practice as a violation of the cultural burial rites of the Idoma people, who even today will not bury their people in a coffin.

¹¹² I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 21.

¹¹³ This is the first government mission assisted established school in Idoma.

¹¹⁴ Otobi is a very small village in the current Otukpo Local Government Area. Though, these tribes are classified as Idoma, and they speak and understand Idoma, they have a very different language of their own called Akpa. The origin of this language still remains a subject of research in Idoma. Up to the time of this writing, no scholar has been able to identify the origin of Akpa that are within the Idoma people.

¹¹⁵ Rev. T. A. Johnston's Journal, 1957, p. 20.

Here we observe Johnston again, making maximum use of his cultural background of parades and his experience of military parades and even the use of the military song implying the confrontation between the Christian faith and the primal religion of the Idoma people, to reach the local people. Even though this seemed to have paid off in the attendance of the Otobi people many of whom probably only came to observe what was happening, and whom Johnston unfortunately described as 'heathen'. Though there were no dramatic conversions to Christianity after these parades and baptisms, one of the young men involved in that Otobi baptism, Mr Omadachi Eka, was asked during fieldwork in Otobi about the effect of such event in Otobi. This was his reply,

<i>ēxi ɔ̃mā wɛ ēxi nɛhi</i>	that day was a great day
<i>nɛ̃ acɛ alɛwa</i>	that many people
<i>kpó ɔ̃u ce ɔ̃wɔ̃ico.</i>	put their trust in God
<i>Amaŋ, ufi</i>	but for fear
<i>I cɛ̃la acɛ alɛwa cɛ̃ tá ɛɛ ŋ'</i>	they could not declare it openly ¹¹⁶

Despite this claim of mass conversion by one of the participants of this baptismal event, not one example of the those claimed to have come to Christianity as result of the parade or the baptism could be found during fieldwork in Otobi.

The period of Tom Johnston and some of his colleagues that worked with him from 1954 to 1960 was a period of considerable growth for the church in Idoma.¹¹⁷ For example, it was recorded that, "In 1954, there were forty eight stations in the whole of Idoma. By 1960, the number increased to two hundred. Visitation became necessary; the missionaries spent many days trekking from village to village".¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁶ Omadachi Eka, *Field work interview*, Otobi, 20th August 1997.

¹¹⁷ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 18.

¹¹⁸ M. M. Famulusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 99.

missionaries were very happy about what was happening during this period that in 1957, they reported, “Many doors have opened to us in untouched villages”.¹¹⁹

The period of 1954 – 1960 witnessed some very significant developments and growth of the church in Idoma, for which the mission had prayed for years. Some of these developments were the establishment and growth of the women’s fellowship that was encouraged by the presence of a female missionary, and the work of the women’s Housecraft Centre, the establishment of a Girls’ Senior Primary School in 1958¹²⁰. The opening of Norcross Methodist Church in Otupko, the first Methodist Church building in Idoma. The need to train more teachers who would also serve as catechists led to the founding of a Teacher Training College in Otukpo. This college was called Jesus College Otukpo. The name was symbolic of all that the college stood for. Both the communal and academic life of the college were patterned on the principle of training Christian teachers and local evangelists for the Church. Grace Igwe one of the early staff of Jesus College was asked during field work in Hichin about the purpose and mission of the college. She replied: “To train teachers who would go and evangelise, preach and teach their people the Gospel, and live the Christian life in the community”.¹²¹ The college started with twenty-one students, seventeen of which were Idoma boys and no girls and the other four Igbo boys, with Mr Trevor Keeves as principal, and Mr. O A Onazi¹²² as the other member of staff.

¹¹⁹ Methodist Church in Great Britain, *MSS Archives*, M. S. S. Report, 1957.

¹²⁰ Norcross Journal, p. 166.

¹²¹ Grace Igwe, field work *Tape interview*, Hitchin 14th July 1998.

¹²² Mr. O. A. Onazi was one of the earliest sets of the Idoma people to accept Christianity in Igwumale. He had served the Methodist church both in Idoma and the national level in several capacities, such as being the Circuit Steward, Diocesan Lay President, Conference Lay President, currently, the Trustee of Methodist Church Nigeria, and an accredited Lay preacher since 1938. For further details of Mr Onazi’s services to the church see, M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 102.

The other exciting event at this period to the credit of the missionaries, was the establishment of the new Girls' Boarding School in Otukpo in 1958, with Mrs. Grace Igwe as principal. This was what Grace had to say about this exciting development in the life of the Church

For so long, the Church seemed to have forgotten women in the education and evangelisation programme of the Church. Thank God, the opportunity came at last for us to train and reach the Idoma women. We can now train Christian teachers, evangelists and Christian families¹²³

No better summary could be found to sum up this exciting phase of the church in Idoma, than that of Chetwynd when he wrote

The Church was growing in numbers and was developing its institutions and other means by which it could enable Christians to grow in faith and understanding, and could help to raise the whole Idoma people to a fuller life in the modern world. The Church was reaching new areas, and in some of the older areas revival came too. Ijigbam was the scene of one such awakening, and after a tour of villages by Rev. T. A. Johnston and H. Kelso and Mr. Neville McElderry, several schools and churches were opened among the Idomas and the Izis.¹²⁴

5. 2. 4. "A Decade of Unprecedented Turbulence" 1960 –1969

The next phase 1960 –1969 of the mission work and the spread of Christianity in Idoma was not an easy one. Norcross described this period, and rightly too, as "a decade of unprecedented turbulence"¹²⁵ for the church in Idoma. This period had some serious implications not only for the mission in Idoma, but for the Idoma people in general. This was a period in which the educational work of the mission and the spread of Christianity in Idoma had some serious set backs due to the political changes in Nigeria, which was followed by the autonomy of the Methodist church in Nigeria from the British Conference. Other reasons were the changes introduced in

¹²³ Grace Igwe, field work, *Tape interview*, Hitchin 14th July 1998.

¹²⁴ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 22-23, also cited by M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 102.

the Nigerian church as the result of these autonomies and the tragic Nigerian civil war which forced the Igbos to flee Idoma; thereby leaving the work of education as a tool of evangelism in Idoma in serious difficulties.

Nigeria became an independent nation on the 1st October 1960. This was followed two years later by the Methodist Church Nigeria becoming autonomous from the British Conference. The implication of this for the Nigerian Methodist church, was that henceforth, the Nigerian conference and the affairs of the Methodist church Nigeria would be directed by the new autonomous Nigerian Conference. Rev. Dr. Soremekun¹²⁶ was appointed and inducted by the Nigerian Conference as its first President, with an Idoma Bible translator Rev. Dr. Egemba Igwe¹²⁷ as the first Secretary of conference.

These national and ecclesiastical autonomies had a lot of implications for the Methodist church in Idoma. First was the reorganisation of the Nigerian Districts in

¹²⁵ Norcross Journal, p. 161.

¹²⁶ The Most Rev. Dr. Soremekun, now the Archbishop Emeritus of Lagos ArchDiocese, was born on 12th August 1906 into a Christian home. His parents were members of Itesi Methodist Church Abeokuta. He attended Itesi Primary school, and was admitted into the Wesley Training Institute in Ibadan in 1921. After training, he worked as Sub-Pastor in Ijebu Circuit. In 1932, he entered Wesley College to be trained for the minister of the Methodist Church. In 1934, he became a probationary minister. In 1936, he was transferred to Olowogbowo Circuit. Later in the same year he won a scholarship for Bachelor of Divinity Course at Richmond College Surrey. Having passed his course, he was ordained on the 19th July 1938 and returned to Nigeria in 1939 and appointed to Wesley College Ibadan. He was appointed Synod Secretary of the Western District in 1944, Principal Wesley College in 1950. In 1954 he was on the staff of Remo Secondary School Shagamu until 1962 when he was appointed the first Nigerian President of the Conference of Methodist Church Nigeria.

¹²⁷ Rev. Dr. Igwe was born on 20th December 1925 at Isingwu in Umuahia. He was educated at Methodist Primary School and Methodist College Uzakoli where he also served as a tutor on the completion of his course. He was later seconded to the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London from 1947-1950 as an Assistant in the West African Department of the School. He later went to Cambridge and studied English Literature and Theology. He candidated for the ministry of the Methodist Church and was trained at Wesley House Cambridge. He returned to Nigeria and was stationed in Otukpo in 1955, where he was engaged in his translation of the Idoma New Testament. He later was transferred to Aba in 1958, and ordained a year later in 1959. After this he was transferred to the Trinity Union College Umuahia as the Methodist representative and the first African tutor on the staff of the College, and later appointed Secretary of Conference in 1962.

which Idoma became part of the new Northern District, instead of belonging to the old Eastern District, which was the cradle of her contact with Christianity. This resulted in Idoma losing all the benefits she derived from belonging to the Eastern District. Rev. T.A. Johnston under whose leadership the church had a considerable growth in Idoma, had to move from Idoma to Kaduna, the headquarters of the new Northern District as chairman of the District.¹²⁸ This too, was a big loss to the Idoma Church.

Secondly, Idoma, which previously consisted of one circuit was in 1963 divided and became four circuits and two sections.¹²⁹ The circuits were Otukpo, Igede, Iga and Odoba, with Igwumale and Makurdi remaining as sections. It is important to note at this point that, even though Igwumale was the first to make contact with Christianity in Idoma land, yet at the time of the creation of the Idoma circuits, the commitment to Christianity of the Igwumale was so weak that they were not viable to be considered as a circuit. The unresponsiveness of the Igwumale people to Christianity was as earlier discussed, due to the confrontational attitudes of the missionaries and some of the early Igwumale Christians to the religion and religious practices of the people. Makurdi could not be a circuit at that time, because it was outside the Idoma area. And the S.U.M missionaries were working in that area with considerable success¹³⁰.

Despite these difficulties, the church in Idoma continued to grow, with the opening of St. Peter's school and the extension of Norcross and St Peters churches in order to

¹²⁸ Norcross Journal, p. 35.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

accommodate the growing numbers of worshippers. A new school and a church were opened at Iga Okpaya in 1963¹³¹. 1963 also witnessed the rebuilding of Jericho church in Otukpo after its destruction by a storm. Otukpa, Odoaba, Ibila and Igwumale churches were built at this period. Jesus College continued to expand with the building of the college chapel in the same year.¹³² This year also saw the replacement of the college principal Mr. Douglas Jenkinson by Mr Roland Hughes.¹³³ The following year witnessed the opening of Wesley High School, Otupko, which was the first ever Methodist secondary school to be opened not only in Idoma, but also in the whole of the Benue Province.¹³⁴ As it was rightly reported during this period

The "ordinary" pastoral and evangelistic work of the church continued. The Methodist Church in Idoma began to co-operate in the New Life For All Movement which was holding evangelistic campaigns throughout West Africa. Catechists continued faithfully to strengthen the household of God: Many teachers also gave valuable service to the church¹³⁵

With all these activities as stated above, the work of the mission continued to quietly progress in Idoma, especially with the teachers and the catechists seeking through visitation, prayer meetings and church services to build the spiritual lives of the Idoma people.¹³⁶

The witness of the Methodist Church in Idoma between 1965-1966 was described in Norcross Journal "as one of light and shade".¹³⁷ It was so described because those two years witnessed some considerable growth of the Church in Idomaland with many of the Idoma people giving their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, and receiving training

¹³¹ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p. 103.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Mr. R. Hughes who came from Bangor in Wales was the longest serving principal of Jesus College. He died two years before the writing of this thesis.

¹³⁴ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 25-26.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 26

¹³⁶ Norcross Journal 169

¹³⁷ Ibid.

through the New Life For All Campaign programme on how to witness. There were signs of great hope with the Idoma people being trained in how to witness to their own very people¹³⁸

The moment of shade for the period, however, came when the scheme that was designed for the Protestant Churches in Nigeria – Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians to come together as a United Church of Nigeria broke down in the last hour. Various reasons¹³⁹ were given for the break up, but the most notable ones were lack of proper communication, where the committee on the union failed, to thoroughly inform the lay members of the church. Secondly, those who were to be bishops both from the Methodists, Presbyterian and Anglican Churches were seriously mindful of their seniority. For example, there was a proposal to appoint as bishops some ministers who were junior in ordination to their counter parts. That move did not go down well with some of the senior ministers. The Methodists during this period, were concerned about their new autonomy from the British Conference of the Methodist church, which they feared by the proposed union, they may not have the opportunity to consolidate.¹⁴⁰ Finally,

There was in-built laxity in the constitution because, by implication of Article 14 of the 'Basis of Church Union', The relations of the United Church as a corporate body with other churches' the Anglican Church would keep its membership of the Lambeth Conference, the Methodist Church its ties with the British Conference, and the Presbyterian Church its overseas connections.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ For further details as to the reasons for the break up of the Nigerian Church union, see Kalu. O. U. *Divided People of God*, NOK Publishers, Lagos, 1978.

¹⁴⁰ M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, p.132.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

As the result of this and other reasons¹⁴² much opposition began to rise at the local level of the church, which eventually led to the break up and the final collapse of the proposals for the Union. It was a disappointing moment for the Church in Nigeria, and the Idoma Methodist church in particular as this break up robbed them of the chance of their superintendent minister, Rev. T. A. Johnston from becoming a Bishop.

Lamenting the break down of the scheme for the Nigerian Church Union, Chetwynd said,

It was a great disappointment to many people throughout the world, not just in Nigeria, when this unity scheme broke down at the last minute. It is sad that Church divisions, which originated from historical events in Europe cannot be overcome in Africa, where they are largely irrelevant.¹⁴³

This disappointment was little compared to the sad and terrible political events that led to the Nigerian civil war 1966-1970. This unpleasant milestone in the historical development of Nigeria as a whole, had far-reaching effects or consequences not only on the political face of Nigeria, but also on the religious life of the entire people of the country, especially the Idoma people who bordered the Igbo people. As the trouble started in the northern part of the country, many of the Igbo catechists and teachers that were working in Idoma had to flee to their homes in the east, leaving the Idoma with virtually no teachers or catechists. This caused a major disruption to the education work of the church and to both church life and the spread of Christianity in Idoma as there were no teachers to continue the education programme of the mission, and equally no pastors for the existing churches.¹⁴⁴ The missionaries were forced by this situation to introduce a 'Crash Programme' that would enable them train the

¹⁴² For detail discussions and reasons for the break up of the Church Union in Nigeria, see M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria*, especially, Chapter Nine on The Church Union; Kalu, O.U *Divided People of God*, NOK Publishers, Lagos, 1978.

¹⁴³ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁴ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese Archives, MCN/ BD/ Idoma workers 1967.

Idoma workers who would fill the gap that was created by the departure of the Igbo workers as the result of the civil war.¹⁴⁵

The Igbos during this war attacked Igwumale and Agila.¹⁴⁶ Many Idoma people were killed by this war, and thousands fled Igwumale, Agila, Ijigban to Utonkon¹⁴⁷ in the current Ado Local Government Area. Many of the Igbo congregations lost their entire membership, thereby affecting the personnel and the financial life of the circuit. The churches in Makurdi, Lafia Akwanga and Keffi areas were destroyed and looted by the Hausas¹⁴⁸ as a result of the war due to their Igbo majority membership.

During this difficult period in the history of Christianity in Idoma, while some of the Idoma Christians fell into the temptation of looting Igbo properties, others showed good examples of Christian brotherhood by harbouring and sheltering their Igbo brothers and sisters and helping them to escape to the east.¹⁴⁹ Although it was recorded that some of the Idoma Christians “fell into the temptation to loot and even kill, some confessed in prayer meetings afterwards, seeking forgiveness and peace”.¹⁵⁰ There was no evidence in Idoma then or now that the Idoma Christians generally were involved in the killing of the Igbos. During field interviews in Idoma, July – September 1997, all the people who were eye witness of the Nigerian civil war that were interviewed, such as, the Most Rev. B.A Achigili¹⁵¹, the current Archbishop, of the North Archdiocese of the Methodist Church, and Mr. O A Onazi¹⁵², one of the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Igwumale and Agila live at the boarder between the Idoma and the Igbo people.

¹⁴⁷ Otukpo Local Government Archives, *efu egbo*, 1966-1970.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ I. G. Chewynd, *Seed Time*, p. 27.

¹⁵¹ Archbishop Achigili was interviewed in Kaduna on the 27th July 1997.

¹⁵² Mr. Onazi, personal interview, 4th August 1997.

earliest Christians in Igwumale, could not confirm such allegations either as eye witnesses of the war or church workers at that time.

Although in the course of war, it is possible some Igbos may have been maltreated or killed, but in general, the balance of probability is that the Idoma were not involved in the killing of the Igbos. It would be very difficult to sustain Chetwynd's general assumption, given above that the Idoma Christians were involved in the killing of the Igbos in the light of the Idoma history, either oral or written.

Although no good is expected from distressing and tragic events like the Nigerian civil war, some good however developed out of it for the Idoma church. With all the Igbo Church workers gone, the missionaries were forced to think of the Idoma involvement in the running of the Churches and schools in Idoma. This led to the emergency opening of a Bible school in Otukpo with Rev. G.C Gardener¹⁵³ as principal in order to train Idoma as catechists for the four circuits in Idoma.¹⁵⁴ One of such students was the late Rev. R. U Ikpeme, the first Idoma minister; another was the current Archbishop of the North, The Most Rev. B.A. Achigili. During this time also, a second Methodist high school for refugees from Igwumale was opened in exile at Otukpo with Mr N.McElderry as principal. With this encouraging development in the training of the Idoma people to be involved in the affairs and running of the Church in Idoma, and the unshrinking efforts of the missionaries to continue their policy of education as an agency of evangelism in opening more schools, despite all the pains and difficulties caused by the tragic civil war; no summary better sums up

¹⁵³ Rev. Gardener is currently, the circuit Minister of Ashford Circuit in Middlesex, England.

¹⁵⁴ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/IDK/ Idoma workers 1967.

the state of the church in Idoma at this period, than that of Miss Weeks in 1967 when she said, “The Idoma Church is in good heart”.¹⁵⁵

5.2.5 Labourers Together 1970 –1974

The next period, 1970 -1974 of the spread of Christianity in Idoma seriously took into consideration the involvement of the indigenous people in the running of the church. The later stage of this period could be described as the era of labourers together and also a period of moratorium¹⁵⁶ for the Methodist missionaries in Idoma as later discussions would highlight.

During this period the educational and evangelistic work of the Church was extended to the Izis¹⁵⁷ part of the Igbo people, who were the former enemies of the Idoma people in the current Enugu State under the leadership of an Idoma catechist Mr Agbese. This was a positive hopeful sign of a peaceful future and reconciliation between the Idoma and the Igbos, who became estranged and bitter towards each other as the result of the Nigerian civil war–1966-1970.

¹⁵⁵ Miss Weeks quoted in Norcross Journal, p 39.

¹⁵⁶ Although Rev. Azariah hinted at the idea of Moratorium at the Edinburgh Conference in his speech title, ‘The Problem of Co-operation between the Foreign and Native Workers’ in page 306-315 in *The History and Records of the World Missionary Conference 1910*. It was Dr. John Gatu at a conference in America in 1971, when he was called to give a speech in which he called for moratorium on sending of missionary from the West to the Third World for five years. But the moratorium on the American missionaries had no time limit, but as long as it is necessary. The idea since then spread to all part of the World and becomes a subject of debate in mission studies. In a leaflet prepared by the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) that meet in the Lusaka Assembly for use in the Churches in Africa, moratorium was defined to mean ‘a pause or halt to something that is happening. The suggestion is that Churches of Africa should consider calling a halt to the flow of missionary personnel and funds from other countries at least for a period. It was hoped that the moratorium would be a strategy that would allow the Churches of Africa to make sure of their own identity and integrity as responsible communions of Christians. Should Moratorium be considered? Can it work? Has it worked anywhere? What would be the out come? For answers to questions like this, see Dr. Jack Thompson, “Missionaries Go Home: The Case for Moratorium”, *Lecture note*, 16th October 1995.

¹⁵⁷ The Izis were the Igbo people who came and attacked, and destroyed the Igwumale and Agila people during the Nigerian Civil War.

The missionaries at this period felt that a higher institution of learning was needed in the Igwumale area in order to solidify their policy of education as an agency of evangelism and to enable them to produce more teachers for the schools in Idoma. As a result of this desire the Methodist High School at Igwumale that was started at this period in exile in Lafia, and later moved Otukpo as the result of the war was moved to Igwumale in 1970 at the end of the war. This was a welcome event as it gradually brought life to Igwumale again after the destruction ruins and devastation of the War.

In 1971, the first Nigerian Chairman for the Northern District, The Rev. J.D. Aluko,¹⁵⁸ a Yoruba man from Iffaki in the then Ondo State was appointed at the Synod.¹⁵⁹ 1972 ushered in a big boost to the Methodist witness in Idoma, in the stationing of the Rev. B.A. Achigili¹⁶⁰ an indigenous Idoma minister in Igwumale where the church had been six years without a resident church worker being under the care of the Odoba circuit minister.¹⁶¹

Another exciting thing that happened during this period was the opening in Otukpo of the biggest, and most impressive church building by The *Idoma*, the *Agaba Idu* of Idoma, His Royal Highness, Dr Abraham Ajene Okpabi in 1972. This Church was named after Rev. Norcross who had died a few years earlier. Currently, it is regarded as the Mother Church for all the Churches in Idoma, and the current seat of the Bishop of Benue.

¹⁵⁸ J.D Aluko, later became the Methodist Bishop of The Northern Diocese and later translated to Ifaki where he retired from the active ministry of the Church.

¹⁵⁹ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Minutes of synod* 1971.

¹⁶⁰ Achigili is currently the Methodist Archbishop of the Northern Arch Diocese and also the Bishop of the North.

In 1973, it was decided by the Benue State Government, that all institutions of higher education in the State were to have Nigerian principals.¹⁶² This was a very difficult time for the missionaries for two reasons. First they had no plan for Nigerian principals to replace them in the running of the Methodist colleges in Idoma at this period. Secondly, the timing of this change was too sudden for them. However, since this was a State law, they had to comply. Mr Roland Hughes after serving for ten years as principal of Jesus College Otukpo had to retire and handed over to Mr Oga, an Idoma man from Igwumale. Mr Holmes handed over Wesley High School to Mr. Ajonye who later became the Lay President of Benue Diocese and also the Conference Lay President of the Methodist Church Nigeria. Igwumale High School was handed over by Mr. McElderry to Mr. Ikenberry.

Towards the end of 1973, a number of young people became interested in the church. Chewynd¹⁶³ suggested that these young people were attracted to the Church through the church choirs, and their colourful processional march to the church in their white uniforms with blue and green trimmings¹⁶⁴. The involvement of the young people in the life of the church was a very hopeful sign for the life of the church in Idoma as they, would eventually become the future leaders of the church in Idoma.

While the church looked forward with hope, this was also a moratorium year for the missionaries serving with Methodist Church Nigeria, and in Idoma in particular, as they had to quickly leave the Methodist Church Nigeria in the hands of Nigerians. It all began with the appointment of the Rev. Professor Bolaji Idowu as president of the

¹⁶¹ Norcross Journal, p. 38.

¹⁶² Benue State Government, *Education Decree*, 1973.

¹⁶³ I. G. Chetwyned, *Seed Time*, p. 32

autonomous Nigerian Methodist Church on 4th October 1972. After less than six months in office he started the process of a major change that history will tell whether that was the best thing for the Methodist Church Nigeria or not.¹⁶⁵

During his investiture and consecration at Trinity Methodist Church Tinubu, Nigeria on Sunday 20th January 1973 Idowu re-echoed his earlier statement after his election. This was what he said

We must undertake the review of our Constitution in a way that would reflect and emphasise that ours is an autonomous Church in Nigeria; there is a task of ordering the life of the Church in such a way that she will minister effectively and adequately to the needs of our people in their native context; here we are faced with the delicate but urgent undertaking of the indigenisation of the Church, which embraces a thorough review of our liturgy; reconciliation throughout Nigeria is a necessity laid upon us. This will tax our spiritual and moral energy – but it is the work into which we have been called and we must fulfil our assignment¹⁶⁶

He soon introduced some major constitutional changes in the church that heavily affected the structural and the administrative set up of the church. For example, while districts became known as Diocese, ordained ministers' status changed to Priests. Superintendent ministers became Presbyters, and district chairmen became Bishops. New offices of Archbishops were created, with the President of Conference becoming Patriarch and overall head of the Methodist Church Nigeria.¹⁶⁷ These changes brought thirteen years of shameful bitter conflict and internal fighting among members of the church resulting in court litigation, mental, emotional and physical assault of members. In the writer's view, it was a period in which the church could be described in the Idoma idiom '*Alacɛ*' – meaning the glory is departed, ruins

¹⁶⁴ See earlier note on p. 192-193.

¹⁶⁵ These changes affected the hierarchical and ecclesiastical structural set of the church, resulting in 13 years of bitter feud and fights in the Methodist Church Nigeria, and over 120-court litigations. For details of these changes and their implications for the Methodist Church Nigeria, see Familiusi, *Methodism in Nigeria (1842-1992)*, Nigeria, NPS Educational Publishers Limited.

¹⁶⁶ Methodist Church Nigeria Conference 1972 *Minutes*, p. 11-12.

devastations, and shame.¹⁶⁸ While the writer is in complete agreement with Idowu's view that the Church life, theology, liturgy and worship should be ordered in such a way as to reflect the Nigerian context, which would enable her to minister to the Nigerian church in her indigenous context, the question was, did the change truly reflect the Nigerian context or was it more of a mixture of other church traditions such as Greek and Russian eastern orthodox churches? In the writer's view, while Idowu is to be commended for his efforts towards the indigenisation of the Church, it is yet to be seen if the Nigerian Methodist Church truly reflects the Nigerian context.

Secondly, although the changes Idowu introduced into the Methodist church Nigeria were accepted by the Nigerian Conference of the church as a whole, such changes were however not good for the Idoma at that period in which the Idoma church was not prepared for local leadership.

The European missionaries including the ones serving in Nigeria found these changes very difficult to handle. They had to leave the Nigerian Conference. In Idoma, 1974 marked the end of a missionary presence as the Rev. T. A Johnston the longest serving missionary in Idoma left and handed over the running of the Church to Rev Akinbo, and Rev. B.A.Achigili, an Idoma man. As the missionaries were leaving a lot of Idoma people were becoming interested in the Church, especially with the presence of an Idoma minister. This gave the missionaries some hope for continuity and growth of God's work in Idoma. Chetwynd prophetically commented on the coming of these young Idoma people to the Church as follows,

¹⁶⁷ For full details of these constitutional changes, see Methodist Church Nigeria, *Constitution*, 1976.

¹⁶⁸ For further details of the introduction of Idowu's change in the Methodist Church Nigeria, and its consequences for the church, and efforts to heal the wounds and reconcile the church, see Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria (1842–1992)*, Chapters 8–12, especially chapter 12.

These young people are the Church Leaders of tomorrow and their singing dancing and drumming is essential if the Church is to be truly African. And the Church in Idoma must be truly African if it is to offer to God the sacrifice He wants, which is the whole life of the Idoma people.¹⁶⁹

It is important to note at this point that as the missionaries were leaving the work in Idoma they came to realise that up till 1974, the Church in Idoma was not an Idoma Church, but probably the Methodist Church Great Britain in Idoma. And that the Church was alien to Idoma life, culture and her response to God in worship and sacrifice. The yearnings as they were leaving was for the Church to be truly Idoma Church, which the Idoma could call their own and not alien. They longed to see Idoma people leading other Idoma to Christ. Rev Hutchinson had earlier hoped for this great Idoma involvement in the life of the Church when he said in 1931, "Doubtless there will be a great awakening one day. May it come soon".¹⁷⁰ Writing 42 years later, Chetwynd said,

Despite the considerable growth of the Church, especially in the 1950s, we are still waiting for that great awakening. It will come when God calls an Idoma Prophet who can set his people's heart on fire with the holy Spirit's Love, so that they give themselves to Jesus in the very deepest part of their lives.¹⁷¹

This, in the writer's view came into fulfilment as from 1975 onwards when the Idoma took over the affairs of the Methodist church in Idoma and made Christianity adaptable to the Idoma context. They developed and reshaped Christianity to suit the Idoma needs, culture and tradition and spread it among themselves and beyond. We will further discuss this in chapter seven.

¹⁶⁹ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁰ Hutchinson Journal, p. 12.

¹⁷¹ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 33.

We have observed in this chapter the spread of Christianity with specific reference to education as an agency of evangelism. We also noted the other strategies that were used by Methodist missionaries to spread Christianity in Idoma, such as open-air meetings, parades, and New life for All programmes. We observed that, though the Methodist missionaries were probably aware of the concerns of missionary bodies in the 1920s about the aims, objectives and methods of mission education in African, they failed to take into serious consideration any of these concerns in their educational policy in Idoma. The Idoma needs, language, culture and village or local situations were left out in their educational activities in Idoma. We equally observed how at the initial stage, the Idoma were very enthusiastic about receiving the missionary education, but later cooled as a result of the missionary's attitude toward their cultural practice of oath taking, which they feared would be introduced to their children should they continue to send their children to school. We finally pointed out the traumatic events of the 1960s Nigerian civil war and the 1970s Idowu's changes introduced into the church. All these had one major consequence for the Idoma church. That was the Igbos and the missionaries left and the Idoma came to the leadership of the Church.

Having discussed the spread of Christianity in Idoma with special reference to education as an agency of evangelism in Idoma, and the various phases of church growth in Idoma, let us leave it here for a moment and shift our focus to the next chapter on Bible translation as an agency for the spread of Christianity in Idoma.

CHAPTER 6

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN IDOMA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BIBLE TRANSLATION

6. 1. Bible Translation

Language is part of the culture of a people, a people without a language, have lost their Identity.... The Church must present Christ to the people in their culture, not a Jewish Christ in European culture. This is why the Bible is being translated into the Idoma language.¹

Bishop Achigili's observations, in his welcome address to the participants of the seminar/workshop on 'The Systematic Way of Writing Idoma' held in Jesus College, Otupko Nigeria in January 1985 was accurate and appropriate in relation to the Idoma situation. Prior to this time, the Idoma had only known and heard of the Gospel in either Western or Igbo cultural terms. If Christ is to be truly part of the Idoma people, He must be given to the Idoma in their tongue and culture, until this is done, Christianity is still standing behind a closed door in Idoma. One of the ways to do this according to the Bishop Achigili is through the translation of the Bible into the Idoma tongue.

Many scholars had already highlighted the value of Bible translation in the spread of Christianity among any given tribe or group of people.² As an example, a famous Scottish missionary David Livingstone who dominated the world of mission during his period, reflected on the value of language as a bearer of Christianity among any given tribe or group of people. He was of the view that, scriptural translation would

¹ The Rt. Rev. B.A. Achigili, "A welcome Address to the Attendants at the Seminar/Workshop on the Systematic Way of Writing Idoma", Held At Jesus College Otukpo on Friday 25th /1/85.

² See for example, Eugene Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language*, New York: Harper and Brothers 1952; Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, New York MaryKnoll, Orbis Books, 1993; W.A. Smalley, *Translation As Mission*, Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1991.

activate the wider Christian process and help preserve the people's culture before and after it had come into contact with Christianity.³ We are in complete agreement with Barrett, when in his seminal work on Christian renewal in Africa, he correctly identified the value of mother tongue translation to the growth and understanding of Christianity among the people, and its contribution to their cultural identity. He argued,

Vernacular scriptures have far greater power to communicate and create religious dynamic than versions of lingua franca such as...French, English which have been in circulation in many areas long before the onset of independency without fomenting disaffection. The vernacular translation enables the ethnic group concerned to grasp the inner meanings of profound and intricate doctrines....Further, it is clear that these vernacular translations – with all its attendant expenditure of effort on orthography, grammars, dictionaries, and studies of tribal cultures – have contributed markedly to the recovery by Africans of cultural identity of their tribe....⁴

Although Barrett was talking specifically about the causes of independent churches in Africa in his seminal paper, his observation on the contribution vernacular translation makes to the culture and the identity of a given group of people is relevant to our Idoma situation.

Rev. Norcross was one of the pioneer missionaries to the Idoma people who himself had to learn their language as best as he could, and then reduce it to writing, for never before had it been written down. Later the translation of the Scripture into the Idoma language began. Reflecting on his experience in Igwumale, this is what he had to say on the value of language and translation work in the spread of Christianity among a given people:

³ For full details of this view, see David Livingstone, *Missionary Researches and Travels in South Africa*, London: John Murray, 1857, especially p, 114.

⁴ Barrett, David B., ed. *African Initiatives in Religion*. Nairobi, East Africa Publishing House, 1968, p.133.

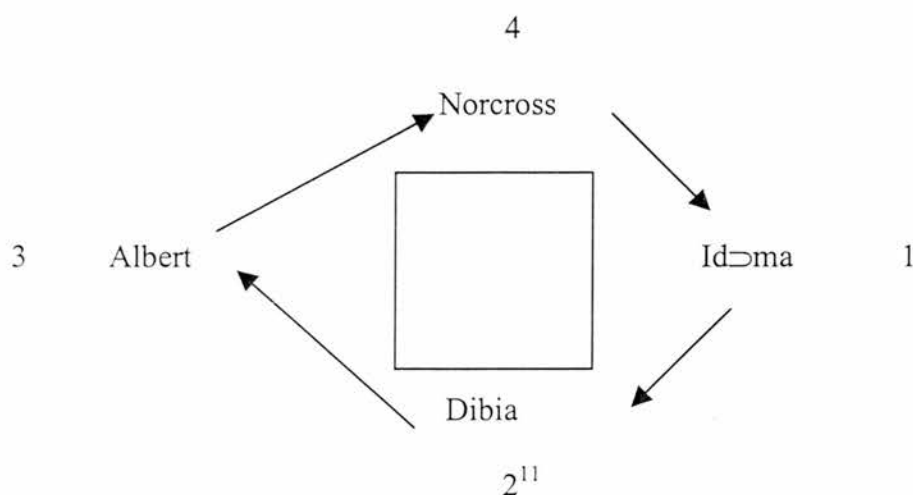
Here was presented a fine opportunity for effective application of all phases of missionary endeavour, evangelisation, educational activities...But we could not talk to them...That is the immediate problem of every missionary going...to a new tribe, ..which had no literature was not conscious of anything in the shape of alphabet or grammar, or even writing.... So, then, is this all-important task of learning a new language, and an effort to write it down phonetically! One of the great needs of Africa is literature, literature of the right kind, and for young Africans the need in the main is for a literature in their own tongues. To write a language for a backward people can do so much, not alone in the priceless boon of good books it may ultimately provide, and most especially the sacred Scriptures, but it can also give in permanent form what is the mind and heart of the people. A language can enshrine all the secret of struggle and hope, all the intricacy of social and political organisation, of religious custom and belief. There is so much that is good that only the written tongue can preserve.⁵

According to Norcross's view, if Christianity is to have any grip and preservation in Idoma at all, it can only do so in the translation of the Scripture into the Idoma language. As late as 1960, a French missionary in Africa was claiming a unique normative status for European culture, saying it possessed the "high degree of perfection which the entire world recognizes".⁶ However, for the missionaries that worked in Idoma, the Bible was the greatest authority and they believed that it should for that reason become the living truth for the Idoma people to whom they brought the Christian message. Therefore, they set out to translate it into the mother tongue. By doing this, they unintentionally gave the Idoma people the standard by which to question claims of western cultural superiority and the Christian message that the missionaries brought to Idoma. These will be discussed later in detail in chapter seven on Idoma Christianity.

⁵ Norcross, "How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to Writing", *Advance*, June 1933, p. 130-131.

6.1.1 The History of Idoma Bible Translation

Language and translation work was a matter of high priority at the very beginning of the missionary work in Idoma, and has remained so till the time of this writing. But where could they begin? Were any resources available to them? The only help they had came through one Mr Dibia⁷ who was “a bi-lingual Idoma-Ibo”⁸. Although, this man was not a paid church worker, he attached himself to the original deputation that went to Idoma, and to Norcross when he later came to settle in Igwumale.⁹ Another helper to Norcross was Albert Nwosu the Igbo catechist, with his own knowledge of Igbo and Effik. Their principle was to learn Idoma via Dibia to Albert and Albert to Norcross who would phonetically write it down based on his prior knowledge of Igbo and Efik phonetic sounds¹⁰. The rectangular formula below illustrates their techniques of learning and writing the Idoma language,



⁶ Cited in Richard Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1990, p. 62.

⁷ see earlier note on the identity of Dibia in chapter 4, p. 138.

⁸ Norcross, *Learning a New Language*, p. 131.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130-131.

¹¹ This formula was thought out by the present writer.

Their working plan to learning the Idoma language “was to be asking the same question at any time and in any place. The question was “*Enema iyine?*”¹² This was intended to mean ‘What is this’? Norcross and Albert would then write the answers down according to the sound. However, because of the way it was written, it could also mean ‘mother born what’? As we may discover later in this chapter, such ambiguity followed them throughout out their works on the Idoma language.

Another of their strategies to learn the Idoma language was through constant visitation to the people either in their homes or on their farms, asking questions through the helpers as charted above, and returning to the manse to master the correct pronunciations of the sounds they heard from the people and phonetically write them down. The “Rule of the house is that until noon only native tongue is to be spoken no English”¹³

The efforts of Norcross and his assistants in learning the Idoma language, and making it a priority in their missionary work in Idoma, were and still are very commendable. However, it is noted that some of the words that were written down during this period and after were not Idoma words, but rather Igbo. The reason for this was simple as Norcross had to heavily rely on the third transliteration from his right hand catechist Mr Albert Nwosu who was an Igbo man. The temptation to represent some of the sounds he heard in Idoma with Igbo orthography was therefore, very strong. This was first due to his fair knowledge of the Igbo language, and secondly, since the Idoma

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Haswell Journal, p. 49. For full details of a typical day’s visit in leaning the Idoma language by the missionaries, see Primitive Missionary Society (PMMS) *Annual report*, 1928, pp 39-40.

did not have any form of writing at this period, it was a case of presenting them with any symbol or form of writing system as representing their language.

In his article 'Sunday Morning at Igumale' (sic), Norcross openly admitted that:

"There is no Okpoto literature, not even so much as an alphabet, so our hymnbook is, of necessity, Ibo."¹⁴ The implication of Norcross's statement was that, as the Idoma people had no written language at that period, an Igbo writing system was therefore, imposed on them instead of the Idoma language. The Idoma had to sing in the Igbo tongue instead of their own tongue. However, the doggedness of these early missionaries¹⁵ in learning the Idoma language bore fruit when at the end of six months learning the language, Norcross had collected a vocabulary of 11,500 words. After which he completed the foundation of the Idoma grammar.¹⁶ Norcross and his colleagues then ventured to start the translation of the Gospel of Mark. They worked on the Gospel of Mark for eighteen months and within that period reviewed it five times.¹⁷ Simultaneously work continued on hymn translations and the primer. In September 1927 the Gospel of Mark, and an Idoma Primer and hymnbook were published.¹⁸ These were commendable efforts on the part of the missionaries.

However, it was difficult to understand that when no Idoma had learned to read or write at this time, it was reported that, "Within five months 400 copies were sold"¹⁹. Norcross was very pleased with this sale. In reporting this to his home church in London, he inflated the number of the copies that were sold. This was how he put it,

¹⁴ Norcross, "Sunday morning in Igwumale", *Advance*, March 1926, p. 50. The Idoma were wrongly referred to as Okpoto or Akpoto by the missionaries. See earlier note in chapter two, p. 31.

¹⁵ This refers to Norcross and his colleagues.

¹⁶ Primitive Methodist Missionary Society, *Synod Reports Okpoto 1925*.

¹⁷ Norcross, *Learning a New Language*, p. 131.

¹⁸ The writer made every effort during fieldwork in Idoma in July-September 1997 to lay hand on any of these early publications, none were found. He was sadly told that they were part of the books eaten by ants in the Bishop's office in Otukpo.

“It is interesting at this juncture to note that we have sold about 700 Idoma books, or nearly one half of the original issue. That is to be regarded as extremely gratifying”²⁰

The question is who were buying these books? Were they the Idoma people who could not read or write at that period or the Igbo workers? On the balance of probability, it could be the Igbo workers in whose language, as indicated earlier the Idoma translation was structured, that were buying these books.

In 1928, a Methodist Catechism, that was translated from the Igbo language by Albert Nwosu, himself an Igbo man, was published²¹. Translation work on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles was continued by Hutchinson and Albert with Mr Nwosu playing a dominant role.²² This was completed in 1929 and given to the Methodist Missionary Society²³ for publication.

At this stage of the translation work in Idoma, there were many intricacies such as the Idoma idiom, poetry, word formation, construction, and grammar that were not dealt with or taken into consideration, nor was there any attempt to establish any standard orthography for the Idoma. There was no attempt either to structure the Idoma translation on any translation theory. This resulted in the later difficulties that were experienced in the reading and writing of the Idoma language, a problem that contributed immensely to the unreadability of the Idoma New Testament which will be discussed later in this chapter. Norcross himself was aware of some of these unsolved problems that relate to their work on the Idoma language. He admitted

¹⁹ Norcross Journal, p.11.

²⁰ Norcross Journal 9th July, 1929.

²¹ I. G. Chetwynd, Seed Time, p. 6.

²² Hutchinson Journal, 13th December 1928.

²³ Norcross Journal, 10th October 1929.

There are intricacies of idiom...the grammar is not easy, whilst the verb has a baffling difficulty we had ever met with elsewhere. There are words for which Idoma speech has no word equivalents....²⁴

Yet no steps were taken to solve these problems or to resolve some of the difficulties professionally or linguistically in this early stage of the translation of the Idoma

Bible. Norcross humbly admitted again,

this sort of work...should only be undertaken by an expert, by those who have had special training...and where an expert can be found for the task, it ought to be his. But it so often happens that the expert is not available. Then one is put under the necessity of doing one's best without being in possession of expert knowledge, save that which has come not through the schools, but through the sheer practice of living among Africans, to note their ways.²⁵

Here we find Norcross graciously accepting his limitations in the work of the Idoma

Bible translation. As far as Norcross was concerned, an expert in this field should

have done the work, but in the absence of one, he had to use his field experiences and

suggests a translation for the Idoma people. This may explain some of the later

problems of the unnaturalness, and unreadability of the Idoma New Testament, which were later dealt with in the Old Testament translation²⁶

It is also observed that despite this early interest in the Idoma language and the value of the vernacular Scripture in the spread of Christianity in Idoma, no effort was made at any stage to introduce the learning of the Idoma language in the school programme of the church, but rather, speaking of the Idoma language attracted a fine²⁷

²⁴ Norcross, "How we Learned a New Language and Reduced it to Writing", *Advance*, June 1933, p. 131.

²⁵ Norcross, "Working On a New Language", *Kingdom Overseas*, 1938, 131-132.

²⁶ See our later discussion on p. 233 ff.

²⁷ See earlier discussion in chapter 5, p. 169-170.

By 1931, the translation work in Idoma had expanded with the translation of a booklet 'God hath spoken'. This was published by the Scripture Gift Mission who sent 1000 copies of it for free distribution in Idoma.²⁸ Norcross had hoped that "the wider circulation of the primer is going to make for a mild kind of happy revolution in the heart and mind of young Idoma". [He pondered], "There is never a copy goes forth but we wonder to what great and grave issues it would have in Idoma".²⁹ Norcross was absolutely right, and his fears proved to be right. As the young Idoma began to struggle to read what had been translated, they came out with such insurgent reactions from all the Idoma districts, especially from the *ƆƆkwu* area that the whole primer and whatever work was done on the translation of the Bible had to be changed to reflect the entire Idoma language instead of the mixture of Igbo and Igwumale dialect in which the work was done.

Such reactions led to a meeting in 1944 at which the church started to review its literature policy. Prior to this period all literature work was said to have been done in the Igwumale dialect³⁰. The missionaries from this point began to apply some of their reasons for moving the mission headquarter from Igwumale to Otukpo to the Idoma language as well. Edwards told a story to illustrate this mood of change, when three boys came from Ojantele in the current Agatu Local Government Area, 49 miles from the mission centre in Otukpo, to buy the translated copies of Luke, Acts and the catechisms, two Idoma primers and hymn books, with the intention of applying for a teacher from the mission who would come to their village and teach them these

²⁸ Hutchinson Journal, 29th January 1933.

²⁹ Norcross, "Crisis and Opportunity", 1929-30, in *Tommorrow is Aslo a Day*, Methodist Church Great Britain, 1977, p 177. Words in bracket are added.

³⁰ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 15.

books. Norcross at this point felt that, they should have been sold what they could read and understand in their own day to day language. He wrote:

Personally, I would feel happier about this if the books which I sold them were written in a dialect which is nearer their own dialect than the Igwumale dialect in which all our literature at present is written."³¹

Later in the same year, the issue was extensively discussed at the Circuit Council meeting that was held in Otukpo. It was reported at this meeting that

One teacher from Igumale (sic) objected to the (translation) work being done by Otukpo teachers, and suggested that it ought to be based on the old Igumale(sic) dialect which had been in use so long, rather than on a dialect which had never been used in translation.

An Adoka (Northern Idoma) representative said that his people could hear the Otukpo dialect but not the Igumale(sic) dialect. He pointed out that whenever his people visited Otukpo they never used an interpreter, which was not the case if any of his people went to the Igumale (sic) area.

Mr. A.O (an uncertificated teacher) a native of Western Idoma, spoke for his people. He said that though the mission was not at present working in his area he hoped that any translation that was done would take the western dialect into account³²

However, it was later agreed at the Circuit Council meeting of October 12-13th 1944, that was held at Utonkon in the current Ado Local Government Area, that firstly the Idoma language committee should be enlarged to include members from the various dialects areas and secondly that since the Idoma spoken by the Otupko and those around them seemed to be more central and familiar to all the Idoma people, it should, hence forth, be the basis of future translation work.³³ It was also agreed that the concerns of other dialects be taken into consideration as the translation work

³¹ Norcross Journal, p. 34

³² Reverend Amos Edward's Report 1943, p 13 also cited by Chetwynd, 1973:16, and Familusi, 1992:97-98.

³³ The Ocobo, Ugoju, oglewu, Onyagede, and most parts of Ocekwu speak the central Idoma. See earlier map on p. viii for the areas of these towns.

progressed.³⁴ This issue however remained unsolved until 1981 when the present writer started the translation of the Idoma Old Testament.³⁵

6.2 The New Testament Translation

The translation work was slowly and gradually continued from these earlier publications³⁶ until 1955, when the Rev. Egemba Igwe was transferred to Otukpo. After teaching at the school of African Languages in London, following the Second World War, Egemba was ordained to the Methodist ministry. At Methodist International House London, he met Grace, also a Nigerian teacher, who became his wife. Called by the Methodist church to move north from his own Igbo homeland to translate the New Testament into Idoma, Egemba and Grace settled in Otukpo the capital of Idoma, twenty miles north of Igwumale which had become the main government centre in Idoma.³⁷

After they settled down, Egemba began the awesome task of translating the New Testament into Idoma. As he himself admitted, he had a lot of difficulties starting this work. He said. "How do I begin? Where do I start? I knew nothing about Idoma language and culture. How can I translate the Bible into Idoma? There was no body around to teach me the language, no paper to write on, no typewriter to use, what do I do?"³⁸

³⁴ Rev Amos Edwards' report, 30th November 1944.

³⁵ See later discussions on p. 232 ff.

³⁶ The earlier publications are the Gospel of Mark, Luke, Acts of the Apostles, hymn book, catechism and the booklet 'God hath spoken' by the Scripture Gift Mission, London.

³⁷ Egemba, *Fieldwork Tape interview*, Hitchin, 14th July 1998.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

From what seemed to be a very hopeless situation in which Egemba and Grace found themselves, they had to make a start. With the help of Rev. Tom Johnston some help came from the Methodist central school Otukpo, where some students were asked to come and teach Egemba some Idoma language. He was very pleased with this development and constituted this group as the Idoma translation team which was made up of the following: Mr. Odumu Ocheibi, Mr. Victor Ameh, Mr. Egboche, Mr. B.A Achigili, Mr O A Ochaba, Mr Peter Adogo, Mr. I. Ikwue, Mr. R.U Ikpeme and Miss. Alache Ogwiji.³⁹ Egemba chose the Gospel of John to begin with, and sat with this team to work together as a group. He soon discovered that this was not working. This was how he put it,

We had to quash this idea, as it was not working. All in the group had their own idea on what and how to translate it, with each arguing very strongly from his or her dialectical position I then had to send every body away to work separately and bring their work to me which I will put together what each individual had done and checked it out with Rev. Johnston who was our great encourager in continuing the work no matter how difficult⁴⁰

Egemba, soon realised that something had to be done about developing a consistent way of writing Idoma. He strongly supported the Norcross view that the Bible had to be translated into the central Idoma tongue, which is spoken by the largest number of the Idoma people. Also he and his helpers thought they had to prepare a scientific alphabet in central Idoma, which is slightly different from the old Igwumale orthography, rather than the mixture of Igbo and Igwumale alphabet, they were using. He admitted “the only primer for teaching, reading Idoma was not consistent with

³⁹ Mr. Ocheibi died five years before the writing of this thesis after leaving the Methodist Church because of the church's stand on polygamy, Egoche is still an Elder in the Methodist church; B.A. Achigili, is the current Methodist Archbishop of the North and the General chairman of the Idoma Translation committee. Mr. Ochaba is the current principal of Methodist High school Obagaji in Agatu Local Government Area. R.U Ikpeme later became a Methodist Minister, served in Iga, Otukpo and Kaduna. He died during the writing of this thesis. Alache Ogwiji, the only female member of the team is currently married to Mr. Adoba, and they are both in the Anglican Church Makurdi now.

⁴⁰ Egemba, *Fieldwork Interview*, Hitchin, 14th July 1998

either dialect and did not differentiate between the various spoken sounds, e.g. o and ɔ, e and ɛ which were vital to the meaning of Idoma words”.⁴¹ This admission by Egemba confirms our earlier view that the Idoma had nothing written down in their language and there was none to teach the missionaries the language they were very anxious to use for the translation of the Idoma Bible. They gave the Idoma a writing system which in our view, was a mixture of Igbo and Effik which, neither represent Igwumale nor central Idoma dialects. Therefore, Egemba had to suggest a new orthography, which in his view represented both the correct phonetical sounds and meaning in Idoma. However, as later discussion will highlight, even his new orthography of Idoma again fell short of representing accurately the Idoma sounds, words and meanings. Nevertheless, his determination to pursue this New Testament translation despite all these difficulties is commendable. He continued with the translation with the fear that it could take some years in translating and that it might come to a people who could not read, or were not prepared for the new dialect and orthography being used.⁴²

In 1958, Egemba and Grace were transferred to an Igbo Circuit in Aba in the current Abia state of Nigeria, and later to Trinity College Umuahia in 1959. They later moved to the university of Ibadan and the department of linguistics where he was a researcher in African linguistics. This move to Ibadan was very helpful to Egemba in his Idoma translation, as he was then more exposed to the principles of Bible translation.⁴³ From Ibadan he was moved to Lagos as the first African Secretary of the Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria. Despite these moves he worked

⁴¹ Weeks, “How The New Testament Came To Idoma, Northern Nigeria”, Methodist Church, Great Britain, *MMS Archives, Idoma*, 281.

⁴² Egemba, *Fieldwork Tape Interview*, Hitchin, 14th July 1998.

constantly on the translation of the Idoma New Testament visiting Idoma during holiday times to work with Idoma translation helpers.⁴⁴ He later moved to the University of Nigeria at Nsukka where he completed the translation work. About two weeks before the start of the Nigerian Civil War in 1966, Egemba's house was set on fire and nothing except the manuscripts of the Idoma New Testament came out of the fire.⁴⁵

Just before the Nigerian civil and the political disturbances intensified, Egemba, who up till then was not a fluent Idoma speaker checked the translated Idoma manuscripts and dispatched it to Bible House in London. This was shortly before Nsukka was bombed by Federal troops and Egemba and other staff of the University of Nsukka fled, losing all their possessions.⁴⁶

In 1967, Miss Majorie Weeks, a lay missionary in Idoma came to England on holiday. She went to Bible House London to enquire about the progress of the Idoma New Testament. She found out that not much progress had been made, as there was no longer any contact with Egemba who was in Biafra⁴⁷. She eventually, with her little knowledge of Idoma helped in the preparation of the final manuscript for printing.⁴⁸ The New Testament was finally published and reached Idoma in 1970, the year the Nigerian civil war ended. It was received with great joy and excitement by many who were ready and able to read it. It was dedicated and launched at a

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See earlier note, p. 222.

⁴⁵ Egemba, *Fieldwork Tape Interview*, Hitchin, 14th July 1998.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Even though Biafra was an old name in the map of Africa, it was the new name the Eastern part of Nigeria gave to themselves as a country during the Nigerian Civil War. Currently the use of the name is prohibited by a military decree.

⁴⁸ Norcross Journal, p35.

thanksgiving service at which the writer was present. This was held at the ɔ̃ɔ̃ Idɔ̃ma⁴⁹'s palace and led by the Rev. T. A Johnston the Chairman of the Northern District of the Methodist Church. The service was attended by all other denominations in Idɔ̃ma land, including the Roman Catholic Bishop of Makurdi.⁵⁰ The presence of His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idɔ̃ma was the climax of that happy day. In his welcome address to the ecumenical service of the dedication of the Idɔ̃ma New Testament, he gave credit to the work of the missionaries, both European and African in the translation of the Idɔ̃ma New Testament and the development of the Idɔ̃ma language. He viewed their contributions as constituting a cultural resource of unequalled merit. Here is his testimony,

<i>Ó wɛ ɔ̃dā n'ɛ̃ɛ̃ ɲ̃</i>	It is not a small thing
<i>Ka aubekée kò</i>	for the missionaries to
<i>Wā ɲ̃mā ɔ̃l'uwā</i>	come from their home
<i>Wā I nwū alɔ̃</i>	to teach us
<i>ɔ̃kpā oojé mla ōotá</i>	reading and writing
<i>ofiy'ɛ̃ duú a</i>	and above all
<i>é klà lɛ dā ku ɔ̃wɔ̃ɔ̃ tǎ</i>	they wrote God's word
<i>okónu ku acēɔ̃l'ɛ̃ alɔ̃</i>	in the tongue of our people ⁵¹

⁴⁹ ɔ̃ɔ̃Idɔ̃ma is an Idɔ̃ma compound word for the chief of Idɔ̃ma.

⁵⁰ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 31-32. Although, The Roman Catholic Church was not involved at any stage in the translation of the Idɔ̃ma New Testament due to the uneasy friendship between the Catholic and Methodist Church at that time. However, the presence of the Catholic Bishop at the dedication service of the Idɔ̃ma New Testament signals a sign of new hope, friendship and better relationship.

⁵¹ His Royal Highness, Dr. Abraham Ajene Okpabi, The Agabaidu of Idɔ̃ma, "A welcome Address to the Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving and the dedication of the Idɔ̃ma New Testament, Held at The ɔ̃ɔ̃Idɔ̃ma's Palace", Otukpo, 1970, p. 2.

As Miss. M. Weeks reported with regards to the publication and the dedication of the Idoma New Testament, "This enables the Idoma church to grow and a further literacy programme was being undertaken."⁵² The Rev. Paul Kingston, a veteran missionary and himself the translator of the Ogoni Bible of Eastern Nigeria, said after thirty years there: "The church with the word is the church that stands".⁵³

While the Rev. Kingston may be right in his statement, it is however, observed that, such a church with God's Word would only be able to stand, if the word that was made available to such a group of people was their own, and understood by them in their every day language and in the context of their culture. The question then, is, was that the case with the Idoma New Testament? Was it readable, understandable, and an accurate clear, natural dynamic equivalent of the Idoma language and culture? This, in the writer's view was far from being the case, which resulted in the problem of the unreadability of the Idoma New Testament today. This problem, was and still is with, the Idoma church today as the result of the Igbo language being enveloped in the Idoma language. The Idoma New Testament to the Idoma people today is like an unwelcome child that cannot be thrown away, but can neither be happily kept. God's Word should be put into the speech of every day life of the Idoma just like the New Testament itself which, as Nida observed, was "not written in the high-flown Asian style of the schoolmaster of the first and second centuries A.D", but, "couched in the words of the common people".⁵⁴

⁵² Weeks, "How the New testament came to Idoma" Norcross Journal, p. 37.

⁵³ The Reverend Paul Kingston, Norcross Journal, p. 37

⁵⁴ E. A. Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language*, p. 23, also cited in Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, p. 192.

As Nida suggested, missionary translators such as Norcross and Egemba should have been giving the Idoma people the word of God in their own language, no matter how strange the idioms might seem.⁵⁵ The distinguishing mark of any vernacular Scriptural translation, in the writer's view, is the effort of such translation to come as close as possible to the day to day speech of the common people. The writer is aware from his own experience as a translator that the principles of organising, explaining, interpreting, translating and utilising a hitherto unwritten language are complicated and difficult matters. Yet the unexpected and incalculable happens when a mother tongue is furnished with a new transcription and launched under its own steam. This seemed not to be the case with the Idoma New Testament, resulting in some problems that are experienced with the Idoma New Testament even today. We will examine two such problems to illustrate our point. The first being:

6.2. 1. The Problem of the Idoma Context.

In this section we shall look at a few examples from the translation of Egemba, and supplement them with the personal experience of the present writer as an Idoma bible translator. Sanneh is perhaps accurate in his observation when he said,

Long before anthropology made field work an indispensable part of scientific inquiry, the agents of scriptural translation had blazed trails in that world, making connections that often illuminated hitherto inaccessible worlds of thought and life. Sometimes – perhaps – often the price paid was the committing of gratuitous errors or a blind persistence that elicited completely different responses from what the Bible translator expected. Whatever the case, translators had no way to acquit themselves other than through the canons of local idiom.⁵⁶

The writer remembers a childhood experience when in a service the phrase, 'may the peace of the Lord be upon you all', was translated in Idoma as *Ondu ko ṛmo iceenyi kla aa eyi kpεεmmm* – meaning, 'may the Lord urinate on all your heads'.

⁵⁵ For details of this view, see E. A. Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language*, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, p. 193.

The translator at this point mixed up the Nigerian Pidgin English in which to ‘pice’ means to urinate with the phonetic sound of peace in Standard English.

The literal translation of a sentence “Behold I stand at the door and knock”⁵⁷ in the Idoma New Testament is *Ma ɔm mahayi odungwu ɔwe ge lɛ abɔtu ɔwe* - meaning ‘I Stand on the door panel and keep knocking’, implied that Christ was declaring Himself as an invader and destroyer who will force his way in no matter what. Scarcely the intended aim of the Idoma New Testament translator. In Idoma, a friendly family visitor will not stand on the door panel and knock, but will come to the house and call the name of the person inside at intervals for three times and in this way identifying himself by voice.⁵⁸ The correct translation should have been “Behold I stand at the door and call”,⁵⁹ especially in view of the following verse.

Secondly, the Idoma have no idea of ship or anchor as about 95% of the Idoma people had never seen a ship or lived near a sea. To therefore, translate literally “...*enɛ o lɛ la ɔtu bɛka ɔgɔli oje nɛhi ku ugbɛnyi* – God is a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”⁶⁰, would not only confuse and confound rather than enlighten, but would portray no meaning in Idoma. And to translate “anchor” as *ɔgɔli oje* – “a metal fork-stick” creates more confusion and wonder followed with the question, ‘what is he talking about’? And when ‘grace and truth’⁶¹ is translated *eyinyinyi mla ɔkwuɛyi* - “mercy and truth”, the Idoma wonders what has happened to the Idoma word for grace - *ɛhi* ? Surely, there is a clear difference between *eyinyinyi* –mercy

⁵⁷ Revelation 3:20.

⁵⁸ For a similar translation problem of unnaturalness, see E. A. Nida, *God’s Word in Man’s Language*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ Revelation 3:20-21.

⁶⁰ Hebrews 6:9.

and *ehi* – grace in Idoma. When things like these examples begin to happen, they demonstrate clearly, that any missionary to Idoma, European or African would have been unprepared for a language such as Idoma, which has more than three to five different ways to speak and describe and distinguish the same word that mean many things. These are just some of many examples, where lack of knowledge of vernacular Idoma and the tendency towards literalness have resulted in a translation which is at best strained and at worst incomprehensible.

The writer is in complete agreement with the Catholic Bishop of Enugu, Nigeria, the Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye, who when addressing the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture in 1973, called into question the desirability of literalism in translation, arguing that, it is not helpful to lift words from the Greek or Latin and implant them in Igbo. Rather he appealed for flexibility and the freedom to represent ideas and things in the day to day language and the cultural context of the people.⁶²

The same argument applies to the Idoma situation as well. Instead of transplanting some Igbo words in the Idoma New Testament, such words should be structured in such a way as to reflect the Idoma receptor cultural context.

6.2. 2.The Factor of the Idoma Recipency

A very strong precondition for any effective translation in any given language, is the translator's complete surrender to the terms of the receptor culture. No matter how much the translator knows, or whatever glorious notion the translator may have about faithfulness to the original forms of the text, such surrender is of paramount

⁶¹ John 1:14.

importance in any translation work. In his excellent and masterly account of the scientific basis of translation Eugene Nida has articulated the receptor cultural premises upon which translation proceeds. As he puts it, a

Translation must conform to the grammatical tradition of the language...a translation in order to be effective must represent the way people speak.⁶³

But this was hardly the case in the Idoma New Testament translation as a few examples have already indicated. As the translation failed completely to represent the Idoma grammar, it created the problem of unreadability, literalism and unnaturalness of the New Testament text, which had to be later dealt with in the Old Testament translation of the Idoma Bible. As Sanneh correctly observes, "It is hard to exaggerate the importance of 'recipiency' in determining what is or what is not a successful translation".⁶⁴ This is why the writer had to do a major revision to bring the Idoma New Testament into line with the day to day language of the Idoma people. We pressed very hard for natural Idoma translation, which will in great part help resolve the present awkward literalism of the New Testament, which deters many people from reading the Idoma New Testament. The Idoma Bible would as a result, become a good example on interchange of cultural values.

Finally, in his article, "Why are Foreigners So Queer?" a Socio-anthropological Approach to Cultural Pluralism" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, July 1981, p. 102-106, Eugene Nida observed that, "the truth of the gospel, if communicated verbally in an accurate form, would be so convincing that the results

⁶² For full details of The Most Rev. Dr. Godfrey Okoye's arguments and views, see Omenka, Nicholas. 1986, "The Role of the Catholic Mission in the Development of Vernacular Literature in Eastern Nigeria" *Journal of Religion in Africa* 16, no 2, 121-137.

⁶³ E.A Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language*, p. 34.

⁶⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, p. 199.

would be assured".⁶⁵ While this view may not be probably true in all cases, it would be a correct observation in the Idoma situation.

In Idoma, despite the valuable efforts of Norcross and his colleagues to master the unwritten Idoma language, and the considerable success that they initially seemed to have in doing so, their verbal communication had been poor and to some extent misleading. This is why the Idoma New Testament had been found to be difficult. It is so literal that the Idoma found it difficult to read and understand. The writer had a personal experience in 1987 when at the Norcross Methodist Cathedral Otukpo a geography teacher in the Mission school was given a New Testament passage to read during the service. He was meant to read this from the Idoma New Testament. But to the writer's surprise, he had to read the passage in English in order to know what was meant in his own mother tongue the Idoma language.

Linguistic inadequacy and improper training on translation theories and principles as earlier admitted by Norcross⁶⁶ were responsible for some of the mistakes that were made in the Idoma New Testament. For example, despite that fact that the Idoma language has tonal distinctions that are extremely important, not only in distinguishing words but in marking the Idoma grammatical relationships, Norcross and his colleagues never learned to use tone in the Idoma Bible translation. And despite the fact that Major R.C Abraham, a former examiner in African Languages for Oxford, London and Edinburgh Universities, and a former anthropological Officer in Nigeria had as early as 1935 called attention to the use of tone in the Idoma

⁶⁵ E. A Nida, " Why Are Foreigners so Queer? Socioanthropological Approach to Cultural Pluralism" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 5, 3, 1981, p.102.

language⁶⁷, his appeal was never heeded by the Idoma New Testament translators. The failure to heed such a call, has been particularly serious in a language such as Idoma in which the only difference, for example, between ‘mother’, ‘yesterday’, ‘four’ and the name of a particular tree in the Idoma word *enɛ* is simply a distinction in tone.⁶⁸

6. 3. The Old Testament Translation

In his annual report on the Igwumale station to his home church in London in 1934, Norcross expressed a desire that was identical with the desire of the present writer which eventually led him to become the Idoma Bible translator. This was how Norcross expressed his craving, “Isn’t it desirable that all the Bible shall be translated into Idoma?”⁶⁹

The present writer was at the dedication and thanksgiving service of the Idoma New Testament in 1970, during which he bought his copy of the newly translated Idoma New Testament. Just looking at its outer cover, he was struck in confusion within the title of the Idoma New Testament, which was *ɛka ɛyipɛ* - which was intended to mean ‘The New Covenant’. But in reality, could equally mean ‘New Monkey’ or ‘A New Carrying Pad’⁷⁰ due to the way that it was written. As the writer flipped through the pages of the newly translated Idoma New Testament, his problem became more compounded due to the unnaturalness of the New Testament translation. This was

⁶⁶ See earlier discussion on p. 218.

⁶⁷ For details, see Major. R. C. Abraham, *The Idoma Language Idoma Wordlists, Idoma Christomathy, Idoma Proverbs*, London, University of London Press, 1951.

⁶⁸ There are many such words, such as, Ada, ɛwa, ɔcɛ, Aje, just to mention a few in which the difference between their meanings lies in tonal distinctions.

⁶⁹ Norcross, Igwumale Station *Annual Report*, 1934.

followed with a personal prayer, “Lord raise somebody to help re-translate this New Testament and the whole Bible into natural Idoma language”.⁷¹

Ten years later, this prayer that was intended to be fulfilled by someone else, was fulfilled in the present writer. This happened in 1980 at Immanuel College of Theology and Christian Education Ibadan, an affiliate school of the University of Ibadan Nigeria, in an Old Testament lecture on the book of Job that was dealing specifically with the philosophical problem of the suffering of the innocent. During this lecture, the Very Rev. Dr S.K. Solanke⁷² introduced to the class, The Rev. Professor Eugene Bunkowske, the then United Bible Society Africa Co-ordinator of Translations. He was asked to briefly talk to the students on United Bible Society translation work. This he convincingly did with gladness. He ended his talk with an open invitation to any one who would like to become a Bible translator. It was at this point that the present writer could no longer hold out, but put up his hand, and offered himself as the Idoma Bible translator. Both Professor Bunkowske and the College Principal, The Very Rev. A.A Omodunbi⁷³ speedily took up this offer, and both informed the writer’s home Bishop The Most Rev. B. A. Achigili, the Archbishop of The North, the Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria and the United Bible Society and the Bible Society of Nigeria. The stage was now set for an Idoma mother tongue speaker to be involved in any substantive capacity in the translation of the Idoma Bible for the first time.

⁷⁰ This is a piece of cloth rolled together, and placed on the head before the loads are placed on. The Idoma people carry their loads on their heads.

⁷¹ Rev Obiabo, Personal Prayer 1970.

⁷² Rev. Dr. S.K Solanke is the current Methodist Bishop of Kwara, Kwara state, Nigeria.

⁷³ Omodunbi is currently The Methodist Archbishop of The Lagos Archdiocese of the Methodist Church Nigeria.

At the end of the writer's training in Ibadan in 1981 he was surprisingly posted to teach at Methodist Theological Institute Shagamu on the insistence of the current Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria, His Eminence Sunday Mbang, who was then the Patriarch's chaplain. The posting created a lot of unhappiness at the stationing committee among the Idoma representatives, and particularly the Bishop of Benue, The Rt. Rev. B. A. Achigili had hoped that the writer was returning home to continue the translation of the Idoma Bible⁷⁴. However, the writer in obedience to the Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria reported at his station in Shagamu in July 1981 but with a protest letter from the Bishop of Benue to the Patriarch of the Methodist Church Nigeria, His Pre-Eminence, Bolaji Idowu. On reading the letter from the Bishop of Benue, the Patriarch Idowu overruled the stationing committee and the writer was returned back the following day to his own Idoma people to translate the Bible into their language.

The question was where and how do we begin the translation of the Old Testament? As noted in our discussion in the sections of the New Testament translation, many factors may contribute to making a translation of the Bible in any language less than satisfactory, such as inadequate training of the translator on translation theories. If such mistakes were to be avoided in the Old Testament translation, then the work must be started with a serious focus on training and on Bible translation theories. According to Smalley, "Assumptions about what constitutes translation, the purpose of translation, what translation should be like, and how translation should be done are...called theories of translation"⁷⁵

⁷⁴ For further details, see The Methodist Church Nigeria, *Minutes of the Stationing Committee*, 1981.

⁷⁵ W. A. Smalley "Language and Culture in the Development of Bible Society Translation theory and Practice" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, April, 1995, p. 16

These translation theories, however, differ from one individual translator to another.

While some translators' theories may grow out of cultural attitudes, education and experience, others may come from personal predisposition, as when some translators are cautious, others innovative. Theological assumptions, particularly those about the inspiration, composition, nature and the use of the Bible may be fundamental to some translators, while to some, the views of the language and culture are critical to their translation theories.⁷⁶

In the Idoma example, the New Testament translators started with a predisposition toward literal translation. This may be out of their convictions, but more likely, they did not know what else to do.⁷⁷ The Idoma vernacular was used in their translation, but not the Idoma idiom. They seemed also less sensitive to the Idoma receptor culture and language. They also lacked the broad cross-linguistic and cross-cultural criteria, which would have helped them judge whether what they had done in the Idoma New Testament was both natural to the Idoma and faithful to the original text of the Bible.⁷⁸

In the Old Testament translation, therefore, the writer had to deviate from the practice of the missionary translators of the New Testament in which, their commitment was literally to the text itself rather than the Idoma context. This was done by focusing on and investigating the Idoma context, which is their history, language, religion, economy, anthropology, music, arts and their physical environment before tackling

⁷⁶ For further details of these different translation theories, see Nida Eugene .A, *God's Word in Man's Language*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1952.

⁷⁷ See Norcross as earlier cited on p. 215.

the concrete task of the Old Testament translation. The adoption of the Idoma context helped the writer to shift radically from the literalness of the text to a fresh contextual translation. The goal was to engage in the Old Testament translation taking into serious consideration, the two sets of languages and cultures. That is, those of the original set also called the 'source language' and culture, and the Idoma set called the 'receptor language' and culture that are involved in the Idoma Bible translation. The overall goal was to produce an Idoma Bible that would meet the criteria of the theory of dynamic natural equivalence translation.

6. 3. 1. Dynamic Natural Equivalence Translation

This theory, as our discussion will indicate, had its roots in linguistics, anthropology, communication and biblical studies. Nida first called it *dynamic equivalence translation*⁷⁹, and later switched the name to *functional equivalence translation* in the 1980s.⁸⁰ Others such as Mildred L. Larson and Katharine Barnwell call it *meaning – based translation*.⁸¹ The writer, in applying this principle tackled the Idoma Old Testament translation on the following premises:

First, the translator would do everything possible to arrive at and translate a well-founded understanding of the meaning of the text, based on the best resources from biblical studies⁸². This however, was not easy as the text to be translated may create some problem on how to translate it in the light of the complexity of the Bible

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Nida, Eugene A. and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden. E.J. Brill, 1969.

⁸⁰ Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1986.

⁸¹ Mildred L Larson, *Meaning – Based Translation: A Guide to Cross – Language Equivalence*, New York, University Press of America, 1984; Barnwell Katharine, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, Dallas, Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992.

composition and transmissions. Therefore, what or whose interpretation of the meaning is to be followed?⁸³ While the edited Hebrew text by the United Bible Societies and other Old Testament Hebrew scholars may take care of problem one, the second question may be taken care of with the use of the translator's handbook⁸⁴ on the various books of the Bible.

The second premise, was not only to understand the meaning⁸⁵ of the source text to be translated, 'but also to express that meaning in the clear' natural Idoma equivalents.⁸⁶

As earlier discussed, the Idoma New Testament did not meet this standard due to its literalness. And as Smalley rightly argued, "...literalness does not lead to naturalness".⁸⁷ This unfortunately was the case with the Idoma New Testament.

However, the greatest care would be required in the application of this premise as one is faced with the problem of faithfulness to the text when confronted by Idoma cultural and linguistic differences.

The third premise was that the Idoma Bible should be communicative to all and missiologically focused. By this it is meant, that the translated Idoma Bible must be accessible to all kinds of people with a very clear and convincing meaning to all levels of the Idoma people. It should be read and understood by both the Idoma

⁸² Various translators have different levels of competence biblical studies and therefore make use of different resources. In the Idoma case, the translator had an added advantage due to his advanced research in Semitics at Queens' University of Belfast.

⁸³ W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture*, p. 64. See also, Nida, Eugene A., *Componential Analysis of Meaning*, The Hague, Mouton, 1975.

⁸⁴ These are specially prepared handbooks on each of the books of the Bible, by the United Bible Society in which, some translation problems such as the one cited above are tackled and discussed in detail with some probable general solutions for each translation projects to apply to their situation as the need may be.

⁸⁵ What is meant by the 'meaning' would be discussed later.

⁸⁶ Ibid., W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture*, E. A. Nida, *Analysis of Meaning*, and Wm. Reyrburn, *Meaning across cultures*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1981.

Christians and the interested non-Idoma Christians alike. The reading should be smooth and suitable to hearing. No other argument best illustrates this third assumption than the statement of Smalley when he said,

The ultimate measure of any translation is to compare what varied readers of the translation actually understand with what the original readers are believed to have understood, and what the modern readers feel with what the original readers probably felt.⁸⁸

The difficulty with an assumption such as this is the question of how the natural equivalence translation would be brought about in a different cultural receptor context? Dr. Barnwell's accurate advice is worth noting with regards to problems such as this. She said,

The Bible is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The translator has a very serious responsibility not to change the meaning in any way. He must be careful not to add to the meaning, or to leave any part of the meaning untranslated. The Bible ... is a book with a message that is meant to be understood. When it was first written, it was written in the everyday language that people of that time spoke. All languages are different. Each language has its own grammar, its own words and expressions. In order to express the meaning of the message he is translating, the translator often has to use grammatical forms and words that are different from those of the language he is translating from. That does not matter. The important thing is that the meaning of the message is unchanged.⁸⁹

The fourth premise was to structure the translated text in such a way that equivalency would apply to some degree to the meaning of each structure of the translated text, but more so on the coherent meaning of the text.⁹⁰ By this we meant, what was the overall meaning of the text? Was it reflected in the translation?⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture* p. 64.

⁸⁸ W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture*, p. 64.

⁸⁹ Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p. 12.

⁹⁰ For details of the argument of coherent meaning of the Bible, see Rev. Ebute Obiabo, *Selected Rhetorical techniques in Exodus 1-14*, an M.A Thesis for Queens University of Belfast, 1993.

⁹¹ For further details, see also Eugene A. Nida, *Language Structure and Translation*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975.

As Smalley rightly observed, “the Bible in the original languages had grammatical structures, meaning structures, the structural organisation of ideas, poetry/prose structures, rhetorical structures, genre structures”⁹², which a literal translation like the Idoma New Testament restricted by its consideration of equivalency of phrases and words. The Old Testament translation, however, in applying the principle of natural dynamic equivalence tried to deviate from this and ask for example, such questions as, is the translation of the book of Proverbs an equivalent translation of the original proverb. How does the Hebrew poetry equate to the natural poetry in Idoma?

The fifth premise was that in translating the Idoma Old Testament the cultural behaviour that is depicted in the Bible is not misrepresented or misinterpreted in the Idoma cultural behaviour. For example what does cultural behaviours like ‘beating one’s breast or putting on of sack cloth’, imply or mean in Idoma? The translation should enable the Idoma readers to understand the cultural events that the Bible depicted.

The sixth and the final premise was for the Idoma Bible to adequately convey the meaning of the source text in the receptor language. For effective implementation of these assumptions, and in order to achieve the desired translation result, the translator had to be trained as argued earlier in this chapter.⁹³

⁹² W. A. Smalley, *Language and Culture*, p. 64.

⁹³ See earlier discussion, p. 237 ff. Also, while the ideal situation is to have more than one translator in a translation project, in the Idoma situation, we had just the one.

6. 3. 2. The Training of the Old Testament Translator

In his stress on the importance of a specially trained person to handle a very delicate and complex work such as the translation of the Idoma Old Testament Norcross rightly said, “this sort of work...should only be undertaken by an expert, by those who have had special training....”⁹⁴. The translator’s training would help him not only to gain an in-depth understanding of the principles of Bible translation but would help him apply these principles effectively in order to achieve an accurate, natural and meaningful translation. The training was done in three parts, as discussed below:

6. 3. 2. 1 Translation Principles, Problems, and Practice

The training was undertaken in the months of July to September 1980, in which the writer was sent to The Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, an affiliate institution of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, in Dallas U.S.A and of the Wycliffe Translation Centre in High Wycombe, Bucks, England, to attend an introductory course on translation principles. The course was organised by the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The United Bible Societies and the Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Benue paid for this training. Katharine Barnwell and Eugene Bunkowske led the course.⁹⁵ Others such as Robert Koops and John Adiva, also took part in the organisation and running of the course. Participants attended the course from sixteen other translation projects from different parts of the country.

⁹⁴ Norcross, “Working On a New Language”, *Kingdom Overseas*, 1938, p.131.

⁹⁵ Katharine Barnwell is currently the of International Translation Department of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas U.S.A. Bunkowske was the United Bible Society Translations Consultant for Nigeria at that time, and currently The Director of Graduate school of missions, in Reformed Theological Seminary, in Jackson Mississippi, U.S.A.

One of the aims of the Wycliff Bible Translators, and the United Bible Society during this training was to help the various translation project translators to understand what Bible translation is. It was defined as the “re-telling, as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the language into which the translation is being made”.⁹⁶ This is very crucial in the Idoma situation where the New Testament already exists, but in an unreadable form, because in our view as earlier discussed, it does not communicate the meaning of the original message in Idoma. It kept too closely to the grammar and words of the original language, and does not take the difference in the Idoma language into serious consideration. This resulted in some of the wrong meanings that are found in the Idoma New Testament.

Our attentions were also focused on the various kinds of translation, with special emphasis on the two principal types of translation, which were a ‘literal’ and ‘dynamic equivalence’ or ‘meaning-based’ translation.⁹⁷ A literal translation is the one according to Katharine Barnwell “that follows as closely as possible the form of the language which is used in the original message”. She equally, defined ‘a meaning-based’ translation as “the one that aims to express the exact meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the new language”.⁹⁸

In the meaning-based translation or dynamic natural equivalence translation, the order of words may change. This principle may use the order that is most clear and natural in the language in which the translation is being made. For example, it is

⁹⁶ Workshop Note, July 1980; and Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ For full and detailed definitions of these terminologies, see, Mildred L Larson. *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*, Mid. University Press of America, 1984; William L. Wonderly, *Bible Translations for Popular Use*, New York; United Bible Societies, 1968; Ernest R. Wendland, *The Cultural Factor in Bible Translation*, London, United Bible Societies, 1987.

natural in English to say ‘two houses’ but unnatural in Idoma whose natural order would be ‘houses two’. In translation therefore, to literally follow the original language order would result in a meaningless translation in Idoma, while to revert the order of the original text to *inu epa* – ‘houses two’ would clearly and naturally communicate the message in Idoma. This principle also advocated the use of the natural idiom of the people in whose language the Bible is being translated.

The participants were also taught on how to translate idioms. An idiom is an expression where the words taken together mean something different from the individual meaning of the word or group of words. Thus an idiomatic expression is a phrase that is natural and meaningful in a particular language, although not necessarily in other languages.⁹⁹ In English for example, the phrases ‘to break the silence’, ‘caught red-handed’, ‘scatter brained’ are all examples of idiom that have meaning for the English speaking people.

However, idioms cannot be translated literally into another language as the meaning of an idiom differs from one language to another. But the meaning of such idioms can be translated from one language to another by an equivalent idiom that would give the true meaning in a direct way. For example, the idiom ‘his mother kept all these things in her heart’¹⁰⁰ was literally translated in the Idoma New Testament as *ene nu le ejiji da nyaa kpotu ipu tu ku nu* – ‘his mother put all these things in her heart’. In Idoma, ‘to keep something in your heart’ means to bear a grudge about something. In translating this verse into Idoma, the translator should have expressed the true

⁹⁸ Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.19

¹⁰⁰ Luke 2:52

meaning directly such as ‘his mother went on thinking about these things’, or had the translator went on and used a natural Idoma idiom, the translation should have been, *éi é nū kwú dā nyā i kpó tū ab ñléufiyē hū nū* ‘his mother kept all these things in the palm of her left hand’, meaning she keeps thinking and reflecting on these things.

Using ones own idiom to translate from the idiom of the source language makes the translation interesting, lively and natural. For example the idiomatic expression in the Acts of Apostles ‘your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent’¹⁰¹ was literally translated in the Idoma New Testament as *oyi ku aa ka o ce aa ikpo eyi! N lē anya duuma η* – your blood be upon your head, I have no fault’. A better, natural Idoma idiomatic translation should have been *īnylā eyi kú aá ka o tū aá ab ñ, ikpó kú um I y ñ anú ē ē n ē abē ku um I y ñ anu η* – ‘Your hair is in your hand. My hand and foot is not there’.

In the Old Testament translation therefore, we were taught to be alert in recognising idioms in the text and aimed at translating such idiom in a way that communicates the true meaning of the text naturally to the Idoma people, either by translating the meaning directly or using the idiom of Idoma that has the same meaning. Using one’s idiom in translation as Barnwell rightly noted, “makes the translation style lively and interesting”¹⁰²

As earlier discussed in the section on translation premises¹⁰³ a good translation must be accurate. This is brought about as the translator re-expresses the meaning of the

¹⁰¹ Acts 18:6 (RSV)

¹⁰² Katharine Barnwell, Bible Translation, p. 22.

¹⁰³ See earlier discussion on pages 236-240 of this chapter.

original message as exactly as possible in the language into which he is translating. Secondly, it must be clear and understandable. It was our aim in the Old Testament translation to communicate the message in a way that all classes of the Idoma people at various levels could readily understand. Thirdly, it must be natural. It was our paramount objective not to sound 'foreign', but to use the natural every day Idoma language. For the Idoma Old Testament therefore, to be truly an Idoma translation and avoid the earlier mistakes of the New Testament, it must meet these three criteria, of accuracy, clarity and naturalness.

Given this theory of dynamic equivalence, the concept of accuracy is not as simple as it seems. However, it is practically possible to have a precise, apparent, explicit and natural or inherent translation. But how do we judge a translation to be accurate, clear and natural or not? If the translated text communicates the exact meaning of the source language and meaning, then it is accurate. But if the meaning is different in any way from the original message, then it is inaccurate. This may include omission – that is when part of the source text is missing, or addition – if anything has been added to the meaning or change – if the meaning has been twisted in any way. It is a clear translation if the message is communicated in such a way that is possibly understandable by all. It is natural when it is in the kind of language that the people use. As Katharine Barnwell put it, “Is it sweet? Is it lively and Interesting?”¹⁰⁴ If the answers to these questions are in the affirmative, then it is a natural translation.

The second training exercise was organised by the Wycliffe Bible translators and the United Bible Societies in February-April 1981. This was an intermediate course on

¹⁰⁴ Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p.24.

translation principles. This course, among other things covered steps in translation; translating some unknown ideas, names, weights, measurements, money, and special biblical terms. Of special interest to the Idoma Old Testament translation were the sections on the steps in translation, and how to study the grammar of one's own language.

It was discovered during this course, that the first thing to do in translation is to study the meaning of the source text to be translated.¹⁰⁵ When the translator became clear of the meaning of the text¹⁰⁶, the second step is to re-express the meaning clearly and naturally in the receptor language.¹⁰⁷ However, as the source language cannot be translated word for word in order to avoid an unnatural literal translation, one has to think of the meaning of the message he is translating. The following diagram illustrates the two steps that were taken in the translation of the Idoma Old Testament:

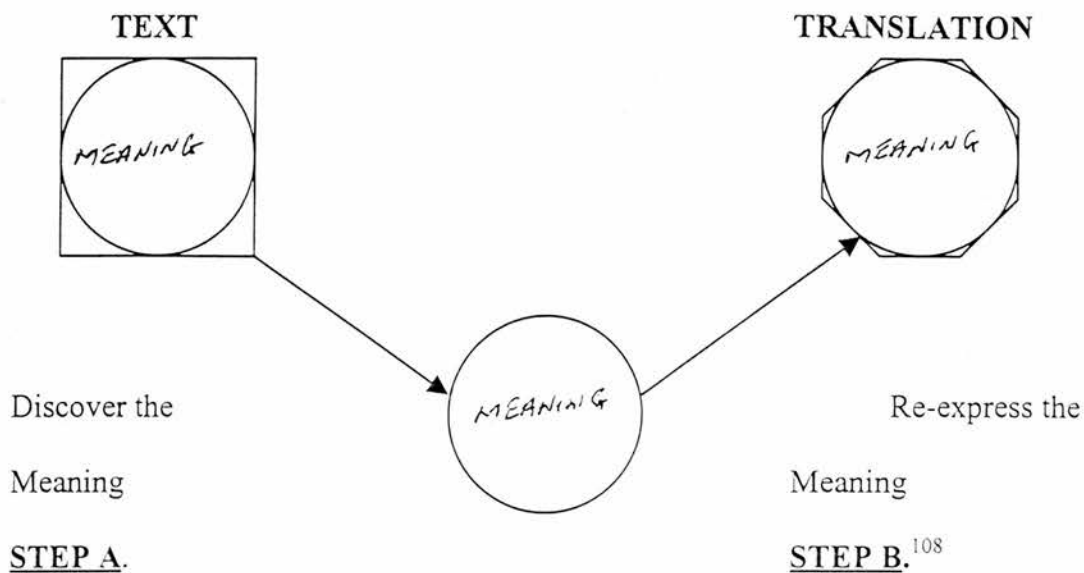
¹⁰⁵ The source text is the text, which is being translated. Related to this is the source language, which is the language of the text, being translated.

¹⁰⁶ See later discussion on the current debates on 'what is meant by meaning'.

¹⁰⁷ The receptor language is the language into which the translation is being done.

SOURCE LANGUAGE

RECEPTOR LANGUAGE



From this diagram it is observed that it is not possible to leave out step A in any translation. The meaning of a text which is trans-cultural must be studied, understood before re-expressing the meaning in the receptor language. Failure to systematically follow these steps would result possibly in a literal translation. The analysis of this chart is that, the text in the source language requires a coherent understanding as illustrated in the circle. When the translator understands the whole meaning of the text as represented in the second circle, that whole meaning is then re-expressed in the source language in the octagon. The whole meaning of the text is presented within the octagon of the source language, because, it is not possible to translate the source text literally into the receptor language. The octagon therefore represents the different ways of re-expressing the meaning of the text in the receptor language.

This brings us to the current controversy among biblical scholars on the meaning of a text. These scholars ask various questions, such as 'what do we mean by the meaning of a text? How should a text be understood and interpreted and from whose

¹⁰⁸ Nigeria Bible Translation Trust, Workshop on Bible Translation, 1981.

perspective?¹⁰⁹ These biblical scholars have advocated various ways of approaching a biblical text for the desired meaning. For example, Vanhoozer in approaching the ‘meaning of the text’ from hermeneutical perspectives in his book, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, challenged the views that see “meaning as relative to the encounter of text and reader [and argued] that meaning is independent of our attempts to interpret it”.¹¹⁰ In other words, the meaning of the text does not depend on who is reading or how one reads. He would rather have us view meaning in terms of communicative action. He argued strongly that there is a meaning in the text, which can be known with relative adequacy and that the reader has the responsibility to do so by cultivating interpretative virtues. According to Vanhoozer, meaning and interpretation are grounded in God’s communicative action in creation. His overall argument was based on author-oriented interpretation and understanding of the meaning of the text. While the act of understanding the meaning of the text from a translation perspective is different from that of his hermenetical approach to the meaning of the text, we however share a common view with Vanhoozer that there is meaning in the text, for all languages of the world if that text is approached from the author-oriented meaning.

Prior to Vanhoozer’s publication, other scholars have earlier advocated several ways of approaching a biblical text for a coherent meaning. A Dutch scholar, J.P.

Fokkelman, in his book, *Narrative Arts in Genesis*, which was published in 1975, argues for the right of biblical scholarship to give the text a chance to speak for itself

¹⁰⁹ See for example, R.S Sugirtharajah, “From Oriental to Post-Colonial: Notes on Reading Practices” *Asia Journal of Theology* 10 (1), 1996, p. 20-27; Clodovis Boff, Hermeneutics Constitution of Theological Pertinency, in *Voices From The Margin, Interpreting The Bible in the Third World*, R.S Sugirtharajah (ed.), London, SPCK, 1991; Laura E. Donaldson, “Postcolonialism And Biblical Reading: An Introduction” *Semeia*, Issue 75, 1996.

through the rhetorical analysis of its style and structure. He develops a synchronic, as opposed to diachronic, reading of the text for the desired meaning. He does this by a close reading of the text which enables him to discover the language patterns, mostly repetition and especially concentric symmetry which uncover the themes of the narrative, resulting in the coherent understanding of the text.¹¹¹ Michael Fishbane, in his book *Text and Texture: Close Reading of Selected Biblical Texts*, published in 1979, provides us with a series of close readings of various biblical texts in which he “seeks to allow the reader [of biblical] texts to engage the texts...not through the tangled history of exegesis”.¹¹² He argues that as one reads the biblical text, the meaning unfolds. In this process of reading, we are told to be aware of the several stylistic conventions such as theme words that would help our overall understanding of the meaning of the text. Another contribution to the pursuit of the meaning of biblical texts comes from the Israeli scholar, Yehuda. T. Radday, in his essay entitled “Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative”, in which he argues for a chiastic approach to unfolding the whole meaning of the text.¹¹³ In 1985 Meir Sternberg published a major book on the strategies of reading the narratives of the Bible, entitled *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, in which he wants us to understand “the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect”.¹¹⁴ As readers of the Bible he suggests we are to make purposive sense of it and be able to explain the sense of the Bible in terms of the communicative skill of the narrator. We must take into consideration the distinctive features of the narrator’s communication in order to be able to understand what he wants to accomplish. Sternberg wants Bible readers to focus on the literary structure and the

¹¹⁰ K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1988, p. 10.

¹¹¹ For details of his argument, See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Arts in Genesis*, Amsterdam, 1975.

¹¹² M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Reading of Selected Biblical Texts*, New York, 1979, p. ix.

¹¹³ For details of Radday’s arguments, see Radday, “Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative” in John W. Welch, *Chiasmus In Antiquity*, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981, especially, pages 50-115.

meaning of the text as it stands, rather than its historical background.¹¹⁵ All these biblical scholars have advocated various approaches in uncovering the meaning of text. While all these approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, in Idoma Bible translation, our approach is based on the author-oriented meaning.

The second thing to do is to study one's culture. In order to be able to clearly communicate the meaning of the source text accurately in the receptor language, it is important to study carefully the culture of the area and the people into whose language the Bible is being translated. Translators in most cases are well-educated people who have generally learnt other languages and cultures such as Hebrew, Greek, English, and have been exposed to cultures other than their own. There is need therefore, for them to return to their own culture and their own people, and rediscover the way their own people think, live, speak and use words. For example, one of the translators in Nigeria, when preparing to translate 'Christ' into his language studied the meaning of Christ, which literally means 'the anointed one'. In his own language, there is an expression for the anointed one; therefore he decided to use it for the translation of Christ. But as he later studied the use of the term in his culture, he discovered that the term 'anointed one' refers to a new bride on whom oil had been poured before marriage. He then realised that the term was not a suitable term to translate Christ. Had he not studied the use of this term in his culture, he might have made a serious mistake.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana, University Press, 1985, p. 15.

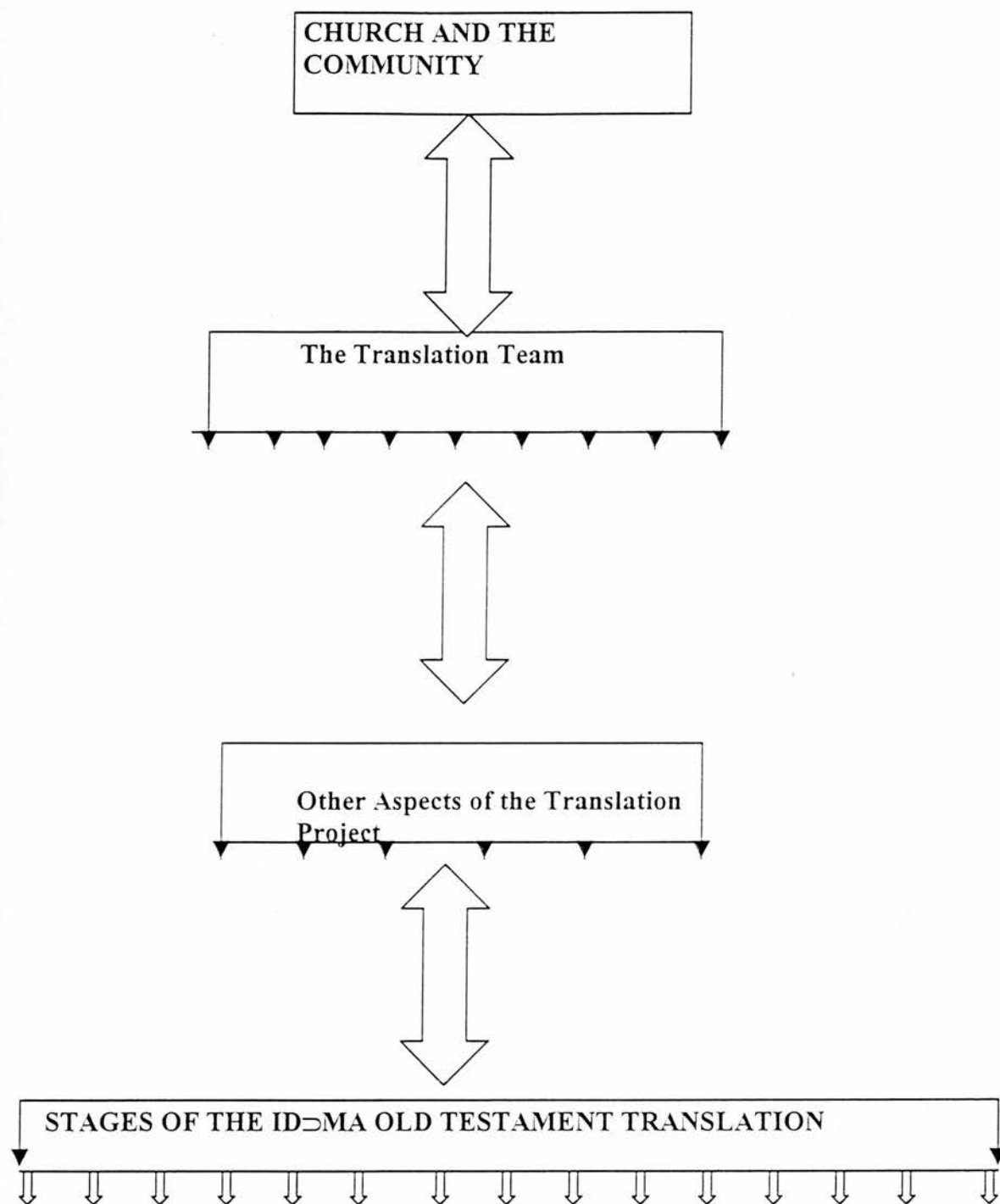
¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ The story cited in this example was given at the Workshop on 'What is my Culture? Do I Know it?' at the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria in April 1981.

The final stage of this training featured predominantly on discovering the grammar of one's own language. This was held in June-July 1981 in the same place. This led to some discussions in establishing a standard orthography for the Idoma language, which up till this point had been a matter of controversy. If the Old Testament translation was to avoid the problem of literalness of the New Testament, then the Idoma orthography had to be established. The issue of Idoma orthography will be discussed later in the thesis. But suffice it to say at this point that the studying of one's own language helps the translator to appreciate the wealth and potential of his language, and enables him to use all the richness of his own language in the translation.

6.3. 2. 2. Planning and Organising the Idoma Old Testament Translation

As discussed earlier, the translation of the Idoma New Testament did not follow any organised plan, nor were the Idoma community and other denominations involved in the translation. It was rather a work of single-handed pioneer missionary translation beginning with Norcross and Albert Nwosu climaxing in the single effort of Rev. Dr. Egemba Igwe. This had some adverse consequences for the translated text, as it could not be properly read, nor understood by the community. It is the writer's view that the work of completing a translation of the Bible into any language is something that no person can do alone. It is a job for all the people who belong to that language area and the entire community into whose language the Bible is being translated. The Idoma Old Testament translation, therefore was organised and planned based on the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and United Bible Society's translation principles and process of Bible translation as set out on the next page:



¹¹⁷ This chart was specific to the Idoma situation only as each translation work has to be planned according to their local situations. Although the idea was based on the Wycliffe and United Bible Society's translation theories and principles on planning and organising a translation project, the writer thought out the chart.

From the above chart, it could be seen that the Idoma translation work followed four blocks of working plans with thirty sub-sections in the overall plan.

6.3.2.2.1 The Church and The Community

First, we have the church and the Idoma community. The Idoma Bible belongs both to the Church and the community. The Idoma Bible translation needed many supporting members from the church to pray regularly for the translator, the project's entire needs and for the entire aspects of the Bible translation work. Both the Church and the community were also needed to give money to meet the various needs of the numerous expenses that are involved in Bible translation. Above all, the involvement of the community was very essential in areas of consultation in matters of language and culture and the acceptability of the translated Bible when completed. Therefore, they were both brought in, as they both serve as the cradle of the translation work.¹¹⁸

6.3.2.2.2 The Translation Team.

As the task of translating the Old Testament was viewed as belonging to the whole Churches in Idoma land, and the Idoma community, there must be a team of people both from the church and the community and outside the Idoma community¹¹⁹ sharing in the work. It was the view of the writer that, the Idoma Old Testament could only be completed successfully, if the whole team that were involved works together, with each member of the team knowing his part in the task, and faithfully fulfilling it. The Old Testament translation team was then set up with the following nine sub-teams

¹¹⁸ For the detail roles of the Church and the community in a Bible Translation project, see Nida E. A. and Taber C. R, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, United Bible Societies, 1969.

¹¹⁹ These are translation consultants and advisors.

6.3.2.2.2.1 The Planning Committee.

The work of this committee was to be responsible for the organisation of the entire translation project. The membership was drawn from all the different denominations¹²⁰ in Idoma, each of the Local Governments areas of Idoma, and the various dialects areas of Idoma, and representatives from the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Language and Culture of Benue State Government. This committee was responsible for the appointment of the translator, reviewers and others who would be involved in the work. It was their job to publicise the project both in the community and in the churches, and be responsible for raising and handling finances for the translation work. They were also responsible for the decisions affecting the orthography and the publication of the Bible.

6.3.2.2.2.2 The Translator

The translator in this translation team who though officially appointed by the planning committee, was seconded by the Methodist Church Nigeria, with full stipend and accommodation to the Idoma Bible translation work.¹²¹ The translator was responsible for the translation work. In addition to this, he was to train some helpers as reviewers and testers. The translator must have spiritual commitment and show a life of a mature Christian, with good knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Technically, he should have a good knowledge of his mother tongue and of his own culture and the understanding of other languages such as English. He should also have a good knowledge of the source languages such as Hebrew and Greek. He must be a

¹²⁰ These are the Methodists, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Cherubim and Seraphim, The Apostolic Church, Faith Apostolic, Holiness Church, Jesus People's Unity, Four Square Gospel, The Assemblies of God Church, The Last Day Messengers, and Divine love churches. Since the formation of the translation committee, other denomination has sprung up in Idoma, who has been involved in the translation work but not on a committee level.

¹²¹ See Methodist Church Nigeria, *Minutes of Conference* 1981.

person of a humble, teachable and persevering character. He will then give all his working time to the preparation of the draft of the translation, test, receive, study and assess all comments with regard to the translation. His individual on-the-job training continued through the working with the translation consultants until the translation was published.¹²²

6.3.2.2.2.3. The Typist

Another member of the team is a full time typist who will work specifically with the translator only. In accordance to the United Bible Society translation policy, the typist must be trained in Bible manuscript preparations. Ideally it is preferable to have some one from outside the language area as in the Idoma Old Testament translation project, who does not understand the language. Getting someone from outside the language area would help avoid the temptation of correcting, adding, or taking away from what the translator had translated. On the other hand, getting someone within the language area could be of great editorial benefit to the translator. However the United Bible Society's position was to have someone from outside the language area.

6.3.2.2.2.4 The Testers

These were four in number and of two categories: Those with formal education, and the ones without formal education. Both basically must have a good knowledge of the Bible and the language and culture of the people. Their job is to test out the translated text, for clarity and naturalness in Idoma. Listening in most cases to people read the text and observing areas of difficulties and noting them carefully for the translator.

¹²² For full qualifications of a Bible translator, see Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas, 1994. And Beeckman J and Callow J.C, *Translating the Word of God*, Zondervan , 1974.

They will ask for meanings of the text as well. They are to take each draft of the translation to the ordinary people of the language area, to find out whether the translation can be understood clearly by them, and whether it communicates the message accurately. They will also read the translation to non-Christians, and will gather suggestions for improving the translation.¹²³ The overall aim of this arm of the team is to help make the translation more accurate, clearer and more natural.

6.3.2.2.2.5. The Reviewers.

These are people who were carefully appointed to receive the translated drafts of the translation for the purpose of making some comment and recommending some possible improvements to the translator. There were twenty people selected for the Idoma Old Testament translation on the basis of their interest in the translation, their willingness to give the required time to the work, their denominational representation and their dialectical areas. They were made up of various people across the community, men and women, some well educated others less educated, others with good knowledge of the Bible, and some with less knowledge of the Bible.¹²⁴ These people had the very difficult task of studying the translation drafts carefully, and sending written comments to the translator. In order to carry out their work as reviewers, they attended a reviewers training course where they learnt the basic principles of translation, and accurate writing of their own language.¹²⁵ They also received some training on what to look for when they got the translated drafts. Only then were they allowed to review the work which covered each book of the Bible.

¹²³ Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p. 220. For a good description of the work of the testers, see Rev. Samuel Iyoku, "Check the Word" *The Bible Translator*, October 1977

¹²⁴ We had to select these people from the cross-section of the Idoma community because, our working assumption is for an Old Testament translation that would be read and understood by all classes of people of the community.

6.3.2.2.2.6 Pastors, Evangelists and Church Leaders

They had an important role to play in the Idoma Old Testament translation. They were responsible for the regular reading of the translated portions in the churches during worship and preaching. They also encouraged the people to use such translated portions for example, in Bible Study groups, in family devotions and personal study, and kept the church informed about the stages of the translation work. Their roles like others were very important, as their work helped the translator to get reaction, comments and observations on the translation from the ordinary people.

6.3.2.2.2.7 The Linguist/ Exegete or Advisor

This member of the team was not himself a mother tongue speaker of the receptor language, but a member of the United Bible Society, with some training in linguistics and biblical studies. He was there to give advice on the planning and the organisation of the work and assist in the training of the translator and in helping the translator, if needed, in the correct exegesis of the Biblical text and in matters of style of writing. He also assisted in the final checking of the translation.

6.3.2.2.2.8 The Consultant

The translation consultant, with advanced knowledge in linguistics, of the translation principles, of biblical languages and biblical studies was the final member of the translation team. He was there to give advice and help in all matters of the translation work. His main job was to give the overall help and guidance until the Bible is published and distributed among the Idoma people. In the Idoma case, we had the advantage of not only having an official consultant from the United Bible Societies,

¹²⁵ For further details on the reviewers' training, see "On Running a Training Course for Reviewers" a Technical Aids prepared by the Africa Area Translation Department, SIL, Nairobi Kenya.

but other consultants from the Nigerian Bible translation Trust, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3 The Other Aspects of the Translation Project.

There were six things that were considered in this stage of the United Bible Society's policy of organising and planning a translation project.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 1. Financing a Translation Work

The detailed financial expenses of the translation work, such as the translator's stipend¹²⁶, salary for the typist, money to attend courses, workshops and travelling expenses, translation equipment etc., were met to a large extent by the United Bible Societies through a special translation finance team that deal specifically with the finance of translation work. Their job included organising a fund raising event for the translation project and also making all the necessary payments on behalf of the translation committee.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 2. Publication

As the Idoma Old Testament translation progressed, a publication sub-committee made sure that a smaller number of all the books of the Old Testament were reproduced in trial versions. Such copies were sent to reviewers, testers and the pastors who would use them and give the translator feed back. This helped identify mistakes and suggestions for improvements before the printing of the final copy.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 3. Literacy

As Barnwell correctly put it, “ Even when a translation of the Bible has been printed, it is of no use unless people can read”.¹²⁷ It was, therefore, decided at the beginning of the Old Testament translation, that a literacy sub-committee be established to teach the Idoma people how to read and write Idoma. They had the difficult task of teaching two classes of people: those who could not read at all, and those who could already read other languages, in our situation English, but could not read their mother-tongue Idoma. Their job was made more difficult due to lack of teaching materials outside the translation, and trained personnel apart from the translator to train them in their work. After much effort, through the various Churches’ literacy classes, approximately 40% of the Idoma Christians were taught, prepared and ready to read the Idoma Bible.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 4. Timing

The work of this group was to see to the proper timing of the translation work. However, their work could only flow very well if there was an agreed orthography of the language, which was not the case with the Idoma bible at that time, and a good translation team with each arm of the team faithfully playing their part.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 5 The Use of the Translated Bible

As the goal of the Idoma Bible translation project was not just to translate and publish the scripture in Idoma, but to see the Idoma Bible in use among the people, and having effects in the lives of the people to God’s honour and glory, it was

¹²⁶ The translator’s stipend in the Old Testament translation work was paid by the Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese.

¹²⁷ Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, p. 224.

necessary to set up a sub-committee on the use of the Bible in order to make sure the desired goal was achieved. They were to make sure the Bible was easily available in all the areas where Idoma is spoken. They were to do this by distributing the Bible through churches, schools bookshops and through the government Ministry of Information, Youths, Sport, Language and Culture.

6. 3. 2. 2. 3. 6. Other Means of Communicating the Idoma Scripture

There were and still are many Idoma people who do not and cannot read books. It was felt that other ways must be found in order to communicate the Idoma Bible to them. This was done mostly through the local Radio Benue, and on National Television on the local channel 10 for Benue State.¹²⁸

Having put in place this entire organisational chart up to this stage, we then moved to the final stage of our planning block.

6. 3. 2. 2. 4 The Stages of the Idoma Old Testament Translation

The aim here was to give in summary form the stages each of the Old Testament books must pass through before they could be ready for printing. Showing the translation team the different stages that need to be covered in the overall translation exercise helped the team to be aware of the difficulties of the work and the amount of prayers and support the translator needed. There are fifteen stages in all, as outlined below:

¹²⁸ The writer was given an hour programme on Radio Benue every Sunday afternoon 2-3 p.m. to conduct religious programmes in Idoma language titled *Oydeyi eyipe* - New Life, and 30 minutes on the Nigerian television, Channel 10, Makurdi, every Friday to teach how to read and write Idoma. All these programmes contributed immensely to reading of the Idoma Old Testament translation.

1. The translator's studying of the text, in order to be sure of the meaning. This may take days or months, depending on the length of the book being studied and the cultural issues related to such text.
 2. The translator makes the first hand-written draft of the text.
 3. The first draft is then discussed with other members of the translation team, especially with the linguist/ exegete or advisor.
 4. The translated text is typed after the discussion on point 3 above.
 5. It is tested by the testers with at least three to four people.
 6. It is revised, and a second draft prepared.
 7. The translation is checked with the help of the translation consultant.
 8. There are further revisions, and trial copies prepared and sent to the reviewers.
 9. Another testing is done.
 10. The translator gathers comments and suggestions, corrections and makes a further revised draft translation.
 11. The translation would be checked for consistency in key words, parallel passages spellings, punctuation, format and lay outs.
 12. The corrections would be entered in the manuscript and double-checked.
 13. The translator makes a 'final read through' to check that every thing is correct.
 14. The text is sent for typesetting at the translation centre. The centre will produce a final 'photo-ready' copy which is sent back to the translator to be checked for the final time.
 15. If the translator is happy with the 'photo-ready' copy, then it is sent to the printer.
- After passing these stages, the Idoma Bible would be ready for distribution in all the Idoma areas and wherever the Idoma language is spoken.

With the above organisational plan in place, we returned to the earlier mentioned issue of a standard writing system for the Idoma people. This in our view was very crucial to the whole of the Idoma Bible translation and the development of the Idoma language.

6. 4. Idoma Orthography

Norcross, Egemba and later Armstrong and R.C Abraham took Idoma down in phonetic transcription without any attempt to suggest the actual number of contrastive units that would be needed to systematically write Idoma. Abraham later attempted to mark both stress and tone. Both his stress and tone were basically an imposition of normal Western intonation patterns upon the Idoma word no matter what the basic tonal patterns may have been in Idoma. What is worse, even this attempt was dropped as these early writers were writing Igbo mixed up with western intonation or Igbo and a mixture of Hausa as R.C. Abraham in 1949 in the introductory note to Idoma language confessed:

The orthography used is a modified version of that of The International Phonetic association, but the tone-marking follows the one used in my "Dictionary of The Hausa Language" 1949.¹²⁹

The first attempts at a practical writing system for the Idoma were produced by the Methodist missionaries in the 1930s and 50s and The result of their efforts can most easily be studied in the hymn books, catechism and the Idoma New Testament of 1970. It is unclear if they ever saw the work of Abraham or deliberately ignored it.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Abraham. R.C. *The Idoma language Idoma wordlists Idoma chrestomathy Idoma Proverbs*, London, London University Press Ltd 1951, p. 3.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Their writing system was ambiguous and non-systematic. For example, while Abraham recognised that Idoma is a tonal language,¹³¹ they did not mark tone. Tone marking in the writer's view is a central determining factor as far as meaning of words is concerned in Idoma. For example, without the tone, the Idoma word *Ada* could mean 'father', 'hut', 'trap', 'pot' or 'first daughter', likewise could *ene* mean 'four', 'yesterday', 'and', 'mother' or a 'tree'. *ewa* could equally mean, 'crowd', 'knife', a 'bird' or a 'cow's tail'.

Forms were often written with two different spellings in the same sentence and it is not possible to discover any logic for their divisions of words, which was often done in different ways in the same sentence. The result was disastrous. No one could read anything until it had first been memorised.

The current orthography of the Idoma language grew out of the work of the present author and his co-workers in the Idoma Bible translation project. It was used extensively in teaching and reading in the Idoma primary schools and secondary schools, and teacher training colleges. It is the standard orthography in the Idoma primers, Government publications, Scripture portions and in Bible translation. This writing system has proven itself practical for the task for which it was designed and capable of opening the world of reading and literature for the people who speak Idoma as their first language. Our aim here is not to give detailed analysis of the Idoma language on which, hopefully a later study will focus. We would, however, highlight some of the basic elements of the Idoma language that are central to our discussion on the orthography of the Idoma Bible translation. This also illustrates,

¹³¹ Ibid.

how the earlier problem of the unreadability and unnaturalness in the earlier Idoma New Testament due to its writing system and non Idoma contextual issues were dealt with.

6. 4. 1. The Basic elements of The Idoma Language

Every language is made up of elements and of the process of linking those elements into meaningful sentences.¹³² The major element in the Idoma language is the words. Idoma words are constructed of either a single syllable or combination of syllables.

6. 4. 1. 1. The Tone

In the Idoma language, the tone is the heart or the centre of the syllable. The vowel or syllabic nasal is the vehicle that carries the tone and the consonant when present is the shockabsorber that prevents the syllables from collapsing into each other. The Idoma tones are as follows: high tone which is marked with an apostrophe (') above the syllable nucleus that carries it. Example, é ó, the mid tone which is marked with a dash above the syllable nucleus that carries it. Example, Ò Ê and the low tone which is left unmarked. Example, A ε.

¹³² Bunkowske, E.W. "Workshop notes on Idoma language", *EWB/dnb/ 15/85*, January 24th 1985

6. 4. 1. 2 The Idoma vowels

The Idoma language has seven vowels as illustrated by the vowels in the following words:

<i>Inyi</i> -thin	I	u	<i>umu</i> -grain flour
<i>Eje</i> -beans	e	o	<i>odo</i> - yellow
<i>enɛ</i> - four	ɛ	ɔ	ɔwɔ -rain
<i>apa</i>	a		Lizard

The Idoma language has two syllabic nasal illustrated in the following words

1. \dot{N} - I 2. $\dot{\eta}$ - not or $n\acute{\epsilon}\acute{\eta}\acute{c}\epsilon$ - small

6. 4. 1. 3. The Idoma Consonants

There are twenty-four consonants in Idoma as illustrated in the following words:

b	<i>abɔ</i> - hand	j	<i>ajɛ</i> - ground	ɨ	<i>ɛɨwú</i> - nose
c	<i>ɛɔ</i> - stone	k	<i>ɛkã</i> - monkey	ɨm	ɔɨmã - Woman's
d	<i>ádã</i> - father	kp	<i>ɛkpa</i> - pocket	ɨw	ɔɨwɛ - Exhibition
f	<i>ofu</i> - twenty	kw	<i>ikwũ</i> - death	ny	ɔnyã - woman
g	ɔgɔ hole	I	<i>ilĩ</i> - cloth	p	<i>ũpũ</i> - forest
gb	<i>agbá</i> - chain	m	ɔmã - salt	t	ɔtɛ' hunting
gw	<i>agwú</i> - leprosy	my	<i>ɛniyɛ</i> - hunger	w	<i>owu</i> - wind
h	<i>ihĩ</i> - yam	n	ɔnã - pounded yam	y	ɔyi' - child

6. 4. 1. 4. Assimilation in the Idoma language

In many cases in the Idoma language noun assimilation or automatic change take place at the boundaries where words in Idoma come together. For example. *Ode ke I wa iεε* - contrary to what you think Ode will come today. However, in some situations, when the conditions are favourable assimilation takes place automatically in Idoma. The necessary favourable condition is an open syllable followed by another open syllable. "An open syllable is the one that has no consonant to protect it from the previous or following syllable".¹³³

Assimilation in Idoma takes place in a number of different environments. Since the translation of the Idoma Old Testament, the following thirteen environments have been discovered to date.

1. Basic Verbs and their objects, e. g., *Ode má ewō*- ode saw a dog.
2. Prepositions and their objects, e. g., *ewū kú Adā wa* - Father's goat came.
3. A Conjunction and the following noun e.g., *Ode mla Okō wa* -Ode and Oko came.
4. A relative pronoun and the following clause.e.g., *ewū nε Abu'wī a'* it is goat that Abu untied.
5. The associative marker and its object e.g., *εga iyi alc lε ɔhi* our place is good.
6. A noun and a following noun e.g., *ɔyi Adā wa* father's son came.
7. A noun and a following descriptive word e.g., *ɔε olɔtū wa* A courageous person came
8. A noun and a following pronoun e.g., *ɔya um wa* My friend came.

¹³³ Bunkowske E. W "Assimilation (Automatic Change) At Word Boundaries In The Idoma Language" *A seminar Paper on the systematic way of writing Idoma*, Advanced Teachers College, Katsina Ala, 24th January, 1985. Since this seminar, Bunkowske who is currently the Professor of

9. A noun and a following number e.g., *Acε igwó' wa* ten people came.
10. A number and a following number *Igwó' εpa wa* twelve came.
11. A pronoun and a following verbal auxiliary e.g., *Ā I wa ḥ'* You didn't come.
12. A basic verb and the following associative marker, e.g., *Ada yᵀ ipu* Ada is pregnant.
13. A noun and a following associative marker *ᵀkc kú Ode Lεᵀhi* Ode's voice is good.

When the Idᵀma tones, vowels consonants, assimilation and the rules or environment of assimilation have been thoroughly mastered a solid foundation for the systematic writing of Idᵀma will be in place. It was on this foundation that the Idᵀma Old Testament translation work started in July 1981, after a public ecumenical inaugural service attended by over fifty thousand people, with the Idᵀma representatives from all over the States of Nigeria, The Benue State Military Governor and His Royal Highness Dr Abrahan Ajene Okpabi, the *Agaidu* of Idᵀma, at the Norcross Cathedral compound on the 29th of June 1981.

The translation work continued until 1985, when in April of that year a seminar/workshop on the Systematic Way of Writing Idᵀma was organised by the present writer in consultation with Benue State University, Universities of Jos, Ibadan, Zaria and Advanced Teachers College Katisina Ala, and the United Bible Societies and the Bible Society of Nigeria. Various papers were presented at this workshop/seminar by various scholars who have interest in the Idᵀma language, such as Professor

Armstrong of the Institute of Linguistics, University of Ibadan, Dr Oko the head of Language studies Advanced Teacher's College Katsina Ala, Dr. Koops the Idoma Bible translation consultant, Professor Bunkowske, The United Bible Society Africa Co-ordinator of Translations, and the writer, on various aspects of the Idoma language.

6. 4. 1. 5. The Idoma Writing Rules

The seminar/workshop ended with the following writing rules that are based on the internal genius of the Idoma language and were intended to be helpful in assisting both the Old Testament translation and the Idoma people with the development of a systematic and standardised way of writing Idoma:

1. The tone should be fully marked in Idoma
2. Since the low tone (\) is most frequent and the least likely to be reinforced in the assimilating situations, it can advantageously be indicated by the absence of a tone mark.
3. So that there is differential between high and mid tone, it is suggested that high tone be marked with vertical stroke (') and the mid tone with a horizontal stroke (-).
4. Two tones should never be written on a single vowel.
5. Vowel length is to be shown by two vowels of the same quality with the same tone, for example, \acute{O} we $\supset ny \supset ny \epsilon$ it is only sweetness.
6. The seven vowels of Idoma should normally be represented by i, e, ϵ , a, \supset , o and u.
7. The syllabic nasals which function like vowels should be written with the appropriate tone. For example, $\acute{N} i w \epsilon n \acute{\epsilon} n \epsilon \acute{\eta}$ I am not small

8. The basic consonants of Idoma should normally be represented as follows: b, c, d, f, g, gb, h, j, k, kp, l, m, n, ny, ŋ, ŋm, p, s (mainly in borrowed words), t, w, and y.
9. Labialized consonants should normally be represented by a w following a basic consonant, e. g., *agwu*, - leprosy, *ikwu* - death and *ɔŋwɛ* - exhibition.
10. Lateralized consonants should normally be represented by an l following the basic consonant, for example, *kplákplá*, *ŋlɔɔŋlɔɔ*, *kléklé* - quick, smooth and bites.
11. Following the constant visual image principle each word in Idoma should be spelled just one way. For example, *um* for my, not *m* or *im*, or *am*, but always *um*.
12. A basic verb and its object are written as separate words when another word separates them in an alternative construction, for example, while the pattern is *O cá um áá* he abused, the diagnostic is *O cá um áá* he abused me.
13. A basic verb and its object which have the same meaning are written together unless a word can separate them, e. g., *O nunu (nu unu)* he fought.
14. In other cases the basic verb and the object should be written as separate word when the verb appears in open form in the object front focus construction, for example, *ɛwū nē o kwú* a - it is goat that he caught.
15. In those cases where the verb does not appear in open form in the object focus construction the verb and the object are written together as one word. *O yɛyɛi ne o yɛyɛi* a it is life that he lived.
16. Words like the preposition *ku*, the conjunction *m̄la*, the relative pronoun *n̄ɛ* and the associative marker *yɪ*, should be written separate from their objects, for example, *i yɪ nū l̄ɛ ɔhi* his situation is good., *ɛwu n̄ɛ ode wɪ a* it is goat that Ode untied, *Ode m̄la okō wa* Ode and Oko came, *ɛwū kú adā wa* father's goat came.

- 17 A noun should be written from a following numbers, pronoun, descriptive word or noun unless the two have become crystallised. For example, *Acɛ igwó wa*, ten people came, *ɔy um wa* my friend came. *ɔce olɛtu wa* a courageous person came. *ɔɛ'Abú nɛ* It is Abu's house. Crystallised title *ɔcɛidma nɛ* it is the ɔcɛidma.
- 18 The constrative markers: comma(,), dash (-), period (.), question mark (?), exclamation point (!) and special concern or completive markers such as (a,i,o, and η) are used to signal contrastive syntactic forms and Semantic functions at the phrase, clause and sentence level.
- 19 Idma words must begin and end in a vowel. No Idma word begins or ends in a consonant.¹³⁴

These rules were agreed upon and accepted as the writing rules for writing the Idma language by all the participants at the workshop, the Benue State Government and later by all the Churches in Idma. The translation of the Idma Old Testament was continued using this standard Idma orthography until April 1987, when the first draft¹³⁵ was completed. Currently the Idma Old Testament is on stage 15 of the translation stages¹³⁶ and the revision of the New Testament is in progress. One wonders why after 17 years of work the complete Idma Bible is still not published? There are several factors that are responsible for the long delay in publishing the Idma Bible. First was, and still is the ill-health of the Very Rev. P.A. Udenyi who is currently co-ordinating this final phase of the translation. Second is the translator's study programme, which has taken longer than the expected period. The third and the

¹³⁴ The Idma writing rules are taken from the concluding paper, "The Writing Rules for Idma", presented by Professor Bunkowske, at the *Seminar/Workshop on the Systematic Way of writing Idma*, Jesus College Otukpo, January 1995.

¹³⁵ By the 'first draft' it is meant all the books of the old Testament have passed through stages 1- 14 of the translation stages described on pages 261 – 263 of this chapter.

most significant reason were the further revisions that had to be made to the existing New Testament due to its literalness.

We have in this chapter examined the value of Bible translation in the spread of Christianity and the efforts of the missionaries to spread Christianity in Idoma through the translation of the Bible into the Idoma language. We noted some of the difficulties they had, such as, their lack of the knowledge of the Idoma context, and their inadequate training in linguistics, Bible translation principles and theories. We also noted the problem of an acceptable Idoma orthography. These problems and others, we concluded, were responsible for the literalness and the unnaturalness of their translations right from 1924 to 1970 in which, the unreadable and ambiguous Idoma New Testament was published.

While their efforts were commended and appreciated by the Idoma people, there was still a great need to re-translate the Idoma New Testament and translate the Old Testament into an accurate, clear and natural Idoma. This led to the involvement of the present writer in the Idoma Bible translation, in which the earlier mistakes of literalness that resulted in the unreadability of the New Testament were corrected through the establishment of an acceptable Idoma orthography. That orthography took into consideration the various dialectical factors in the Idoma language.

With an organised working plan as illustrated by the chart¹³⁷ in our discussion, the Old Testament translation was completed in April of 1987, and is now at the final

¹³⁶ See page 260-261.

¹³⁷ See page 251 for the chart.

phase for publication. Even though, the entire Bible is not printed yet, both the process of the translation and the translated texts which were circulated to the churches, schools and Government institutions had made, and continues to make a profound impact both on Idoma Christianity and the Idoma community. Such impact, for example could be measured in terms of many Idoma Christians and non-Christians who can now read and write the Idoma language, and also read some portions of the translated Scripture as the result of the translation work. The translation of the Idoma Bible also led to the Benue State Government's re-newed interest in the promotion of the Idoma language through Radio and Television, and the approval of the Idoma language as a subject to be taught in primary and post primary institutions throughout out Benue State. All these came into being as a result of the Idoma Bible translation project. Further effects of the Idoma Bible translation the Idoma Christianity and the Idoma community will be examined in the next chapter on Idoma Christianity today.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IDOMA CHRISTIANITY TODAY

Dietrich Westermann in his Duff Lectures of 1937 that were subsequently published as *Africa and Christianity*, was of the view that, in Africa the transposition of Christianity should involve the complete extermination of all that constituted the formation of the African pre-Christian experience or religious tradition. This was his advice to missionaries working in Africa,

However anxious a missionary may be to appreciate and retain indigenous social and moral values, in the case of religion he has to be ruthless...he has to admit and even emphasize that the Religion he teaches is opposed to the existing one and the one has to cede to the other¹

As far as Westermann was concerned, “giving the new means taking away the old”.²

Thirty years later, Kenneth Cragg in his series of lectures at Cambridge University which were subsequently published as *Christianity in World Perspective*, countered Westermann’s view and argued that,

On the contrary; it means harnessing its possibilities [i.e., of the old] and setting up within it the revolution that will both fulfil and transform it. For if the old is taken away, to whom will the new be given?³

Westermann was not the only one who felt concerned or troubled as what to do with the pre-Christian religious and cultural tradition of the Africans. Most missionaries that came to Africa as a whole, Idoma inclusive, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries took the general western view or that of the *Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910*, which sadly, concluded and described the primal African religious experience as ‘Animism’ that contained “no preparation for Christianity”⁴.

¹Dietrich Westermann, 1937, “Africa and Christianity” *Duff Lectures 1953*, London, Oxford University Press.

² Ibid.

³ Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1968, p.57.

⁴ World Missionary Conference 1910, Report of Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religion*, Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910, p.24.

However, seventy years after the Edinburgh Conference, some African theologians, began to refer to Africa as Christian Africa. By the 1980s African Christians were struggling with how to relate the pre-Christian primal religious experience to the new message that Christianity is bombarding them with. Even some missionaries were beginning to worry about what to do with African past religious experience. Should it be exterminated, or got rid of or not? Would the new Christian faith make sense to the Africans without their primal religious experience?

Scholars like Adrian Hastings for example, ventured to suggest “something of a dialogue between the African Christian...and the perennial religious spiritualities of Africa”⁵. He was beginning to feel that the “areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised”⁶.

Hastings’s observations were confirmed by the Ghanaian theologian, Kwesi Dickson in his survey article on *Research in the History of Religion in West Africa*⁷; he lamented the lack of research in the area of “biblical studies and customs”⁸ in West Africa. Since then, interest has shifted from viewing the African primal religious experience as of ‘Scant theological significance’ to the “very centre of academic stage”⁹. Andrew Walls argued that such a shift came about because the Africans who were trained in theology with a western syllabus, were turning away from the unsympathetic western missionary interpretation of the African primal religious past

⁵ Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity – An Essay in Interpretation*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976, p. 50f.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Kwesi A. Dickson, “Research in the History of Religions in West Africa” in *Religion*, August, 1975.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ A. Hastings, *African Christianity*, p. 50.

to a more basic cultural, primal religious past of their own and their people's present theological presumptions¹⁰

There couldn't be a more eloquent statement as regards the need of a constructive interaction between Christianity and the African culture than the appraisal at the 1975 *Jos Nigeria Conference on Christianity in Independent Africa*, by Archbishop [then Bishop] Desmond Tutu when he correctly stated,

It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with the deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as a pale imitation of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith¹¹.

If, as argued by E. Fashole – Luke “that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity”¹², then it becomes mandatory for the African Christians and the Idoma Christians in particular to draw together the various Idoma content which makes up the Idoma total primal religious and cultural experience into a coherent and meaningful partner that can be called and described as Idoma Christianity. As correctly argued by Walls, “a past is vital for all of us –without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are”¹³. The pre-eminent or fundamental concern of the Idoma Christians at the moment is this: what is the past of the Idoma Christian? How does the Idoma past relate to the Idoma now? Or, what are the relationships of their primal religious faith with the present one? It is suggested that if Christianity is to be said to belong to the Idoma, a bridge must be found between the old-that is the

¹⁰ A. F Walls, “Africa and Christian Identity” in *Mission Focus*, 6, No.7 (November), 1978, p.13 1.

¹¹ Tutu, Desmond, “Whither African Theology” In E.W. Fashole-luke, et. Al (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London, Rex Collins, 1978:13.

¹² Fashole – Luke, E. W, “The Quest for an African Christian Theology” in *Ecumenical Review*, 27, no. 3, 1978, p. 268.

Idoma past context and the new-Christianity. There should be such integration between the two that Idoma Christianity should in the words of Idowu bear “the distinctive stamp of indigenous originality”¹⁴ in terms of beliefs, practices, rituals and liturgies. The Idoma must be able to say that Christianity has become real and at home with them. In order for them to achieve this, the Idoma have to reshape and develop Christianity to suit their needs. Christianity must be made to adapt to the Idoma cultural context.¹⁵

The principal aim of this chapter therefore, is to examine among other things, how the Idoma reshaped and developed Christianity in order to adapt it to the Idoma context, thus making it Idoma Christianity. Even though, Christianity had been in Idomaland since 1924¹⁶, it could be and perhaps, rightly suggested or argued that Christianity has never really made a decisive penetration into the Idoma life and context until after 1974 when the missionaries finally left Idoma. Various reasons could be suggested as to why, though present in Idoma, Christianity was not Idoma but alien. For instance, Christianity may not have been communicated to the Idoma in their concrete historical situations. The Idoma Christians have not been taught by the missionaries on how to live their new-found faith –Christianity in the midst of the Idoma culture, context, rituals and traditions. On the contrary, they were taught to discontinue the practice of certain customs and festivals such as the *Alekwu* festival¹⁷. For the Idoma Christians, the question of *Alekwu* has always been a problem.

¹³ A. F Walls, *Christian Identity*, p. 13.

¹⁴ E. B. Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, London, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 23.

¹⁵ For the definition of Idoma context, See earlier discussion in chapter 1, p. 6-8.

¹⁶ See earlier discussion in Chapter four, p. 125-128.

Are there certain Idoma customs or cultural practice and rituals that could be rightly adapted by Christianity or the church in Idoma to express the Christian message? In illustrating our point, we will be focusing among other issues on three main cultural practices: the child naming ceremony, marriage and burial rites which Christianity adapted in Idoma to suit the Idoma needs and in doing so, translated itself into the Idoma context, thus, creating an Idoma Christianity and not an alien faith.

It is the writer's view that a precedent had been set from church history in a way, when the early church institutionalised Easter and Christmas. Both seasons were non-Christian festivals, but now became occasions to express some key elements of the Christian faith. As various cultures differ, so must the presentation of Christianity in the various cultures. The anthropologist, Charles Kraft in his book *Christianity in Culture* tells how some missionaries were asked to give the main point of Joseph's story in the Hebrew Bible. While the expatriate missionaries all painted Joseph as a man who remained faithful to God and his master no matter what happened to him, the Africans on their part portrayed Joseph as a man who never forgot his family tie, no matter how far, he travelled away from home. He then drew a conclusion that, "Both of these meanings are legitimate understandings of the passage. But differing cultural backgrounds led one group to one interpretation and the other group to another interpretation"¹⁸. It holds therefore, that if any meaningful interaction is to take place between the Idoma and Christianity, the socio-historical and the religio-cultural context of the Idoma must be taken into serious consideration and fully appreciated.

¹⁷ See earlier discussion in Chapter 3, p. 101-104.

This chapter, among other things will therefore, examine such cultural process through which the Idoma came to terms with Christianity and accepted it as an essential factor of their culture and tried to reshape and develop Christianity to suit their needs, customs and traditions. This chapter will ask what has Christianity done to the Idoma? Have the Idoma been robbed of their life, culture and traditions or have the Idoma been able to persuade Christianity to translate itself into the Idoma culture and life as it did in the Aramaic and Hellenistic cultures philosophies and world views?¹⁹ In addition to using the Idoma birth rites, marriage ceremonies and burial rites to illustrate our point, we will also draw out the theological implications of life after death for Idoma Christianity based on the latter illustration. We will also examine the liturgical life of the Idoma Christians today that enabled Christianity to take root in the soil of the Idoma culture in which they are planted and how it grew in structure and institution of her own and not something alien. This chapter will conclude with a specific reference to the effect of the Idoma Bible translation on the Idoma. This in our view is crucial to the later theological developments of the Idoma Christianity, especially in relation to issues such as polygamy and bride price.

When the missionaries left Idoma in 1974²⁰, the mantle of leadership fell on the only Idoma minister the church had then, Rev. B.A. Achigili [then Igwumale circuit minister, later bishop of Benue, and current Archbishop of the north]. He was left with an enormous responsibility of the continuity of the mission work in Idoma. He was equally aware of the problems the Idoma had with Christianity, due to its antagonistic

¹⁸ Kraft Charles H, *Christianity in Culture*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980, p. 9.

¹⁹ For a classic discussion on the translatability of Christianity into the various cultures she made contact with, see Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering The West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1993.

and unsympathetic view of the Idoma cultural practices.²¹ Archbishop Achigili tackled these problems head-on, first by embarking on an intensive programme of training some indigenous workers for the church in Idoma. Second, and to some extent, more significantly by persuading the church leaders that the church must adapt to the Idoma culture in order to make Christianity more genuinely Idoma.

On the first point, Achigili opened a Bible school in Igwumale, where local church catechists were trained to take the place of the Igbo catechists who fled Idoma as a result of the war²² and the final departure of the missionaries from Idoma. The Bible school had 24 students with Mr Obochi as principal. It was a one-year training school for local church workers. The students after graduation were posted to various churches as catechists.²³ This was very profitable to the church, as some of these students later became ministers²⁴ in the church. As a result of the training programme the staff strength of the church increased, and more efficient works were done, as these set of workers began to communicate with the Idoma directly in their own idiom.

When the missionaries left Idoma, there was only one Idoma minister and two catechists²⁵. But today Idoma has one Archbishop, two Bishops, ten Presbyters, thirty-four ministers, twenty sub-pastors, and eight deaconesses.²⁶

²⁰ See earlier discussion in chapter 5, p. 208-210.

²¹ See earlier discussion in chapter four, p. 145-150.

²² Even though, the war was over, the Igbos did not have that confidence to return to Idoma just four years after the war, more so that the Idoma were directly attacked by the Igbos during the Nigerian civil war.

²³ This Bible school was moved to Otukpo and later to Igede, where grew in size and was upgraded to a full theological institution of the Methodist Church Nigeria, where she train her ministers and sub-Pastors and Deaconess across the country today.

²⁴ The present writer, Very Rev. Andrew Ameh, the current minister of Makurdi Circuit, and others such as The Rev. J.I Ino, Atama, Oko were all students of the Igwumale Bible college.

²⁵ See Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives MCN/BD/ Church workers/ 1/1*.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

Achigili continued with modification, the missionary policy of using education as a strategy for church growth in Idoma. He did this by involving the community leaders²⁷ in the running of the affairs of the schools. As a result of the involvement of the various Idoma community leaders and the indigenous workers in the leadership and running of the schools, the number of primary schools grew from 24 to 280 and secondary schools from 5 to 18, in seven years between 1974-1981.²⁸ The subsequent year witnessed the establishment of the school for the physically handicapped²⁹ and the Agricultural and Bible school³⁰ in Obobu Ikachi in the current Diocese of Igede. The establishment of more schools, and especially, the school for the physically handicapped helped the church to expand and penetrate deeper into the Idoma community, life and culture.

There had been a tremendous increase in church growth and attendance as the result of this. For example, by 1974, there were 200 churches, in four Idoma circuits with one Idoma minister and three Yoruba ministers.³¹ But today, there are over 600 churches in Idoma, with 2 Dioceses, 1 Archbishop, 2 Bishops, 10 Presbyters, 34 Idoma ministers, 8 deaconess and over 20 sub-pastors.³² What were the reasons behind the Idoma suddenly flocking to the schools and churches immediately after 1974, when our earlier discussion noted the problems they had with Christianity?

²⁷ see earlier discussion in Chapter two, p 38-44 for the types and roles of these leaders in the Idoma community.

²⁸ See Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Diocesan, Education Report.

²⁹ This was the first of such school to be established in the whole of Benue State.

³⁰ The Bible School have grown to a full theological college today where Methodist Church and other denominations train their church ministers and lay workers.

³¹ See Rev. Tom Johnston Journal, 1974.

Several factors were responsible for this phenomenal growth of the Church in Idoma, such as the Idoma involvement in the leadership of the Church. This Idoma factor in the mission and life of the church helped to shift the emphasis or the view of mission as a specialised department, which is the sole responsibility of expatriates. The Idoma experience of responsible flexibility in the church life has made a positive contribution to the growth of the church in Idoma. The African leadership have the advantage over the missionaries in the appreciation of the deeper nuances of their own language and local resource such as *egɔ*³³-‘age group’, which was used for the growth of the church. However, the main principal factor that contributed to such growth was the adaptation of some of the Idoma cultural practice by Christianity as will be illustrated later in this chapter. We could have discussed all these factors in detail, but due to the limitation and the specific focus of this chapter, we will briefly mention some of them and discuss in detail the latter, which is the principal focus of this chapter.

7. 1 Idoma Elders

Archbishop Achigili quickly realised that in order for the church to be truly Idoma, in addition to his own indigenous leadership skills, he had to bring in the collective traditional leadership of the Idoma community and that of the church into the running and the spread of the church in Idoma. In 1975, in the *ɔcɛIdoma*³⁴’s palace in Otukpo, he called a meeting of the various *ɔpu*³⁵ and *IpuIdoma*³⁶ in which he invited all

³² Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives MCN/BD/Statistical Report/Vol. 3/2*.

³³ See later discussion for the use of *egɔ* in Idoma Christianity.

³⁴ *ɔcɛIdoma* is the paramount first class chief of the Idoma. He is both the political and spiritual head of the Idoma people.

³⁵ For the definition of *ɔpu*, see earlier discussion in chapter 2, p. 37.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

the title holders³⁷ in the Idoma society, and consulted with them on how and what to do in order to make Christianity Idoma and not something alien. Such recognition of these traditional title holders and their views with regard to the life of the church in Idoma after being brushed aside for 50 years by the missionaries, made them feel for the first time part of what was happening in Idoma in relation to Christianity. Their involvement in the life of the church enabled them to remove some of the restrictions they placed on their children in attending church meetings. For example, during fieldwork in Ocobo on the 18th of August 1996, Chief Oko the Agbo of Ocobo was asked why his children were more involved in the church in comparison to other chiefs, children? This was his reply,

<i>Ayi um gaá wε icɔɔci</i>	my children joined the church
<i>eko nē'ē fu um ɔcεugāda</i>	when they appointed me chief of the
	chair
<i>kū inɔɔkpá aa</i>	of the school
<i>Abɔ̃ n lε eyi kū um kwu ajε</i>	As my eye was on the ground
<i>yɔ̃ i má ɔda doodu aa,</i>	looking on all that was happening
<i>úkúɔ̃ kú icɔɔci I kla daobu tā um gε ŋ'</i>	the work of the church was no longer
	dark to me
<i>Abɔ̃ ɔɔ um má ka ólεɔhi aa</i>	As I saw that it was good
<i>Anɔ̃ ɔɔ um kpó ayi tu ɔɔ a.</i> ³⁸	I put my children in

Chief Oko's reply illustrates our argument. Had he not been appointed as the Chairman for the community school, his children wouldn't have been involved in the

³⁷ These title holders included: The Anyakwuɔce - the Elders; ɔcaliya- Counsellors; Acadu – the royal undertaker and the kingmaker; ɔcefɔ – the commander in chief; ɔkpacu – the land administrator and the ɔceolohi- he who holds the crowd together.

³⁸ Chief Oko the Agbo of Ocobo, fieldwork interview, 18th August 1996.

church and the church in Idoma would have lost their immense contribution in terms of personnel and finance to the church today. As he was brought into the leadership and the running of the local school, he felt he was no longer in the dark about what the church was doing in his area, and as result, he allowed his children to join the church. Chief Oko's example in one of many such examples in the story of the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity. Their second significant role was the impartation or transmission of the church message and views to the Idoma people at the various levels of their jurisdiction, thus enhancing church growth and membership in Idoma.

7. 2. 'ḡḡ'

The next move was the church's full adoption of 'ḡḡ'⁹ for collective social activities of the church in Idoma. The church members were divided into 'ḡḡ' - age groups for the collective social activities of the church. The use of 'ḡḡ' in meeting the social needs of Idoma Christianity was reinforced as they began to read the translated texts of the Idoma Bible, especially, as they read *Ukūl' Ku Acē Otūch' 2:42-44* – Acts 2:42-44, they soon realised that they were embarking on an exercise that was practised by the early Christians in the Bible. For example, the activities of the early Christians in the above mentioned chapter included meeting in each other's homes, praying together, breaking of bread, having fellowship with one another and sharing with each other according to each others' needs. Such practices had similarities with the activities of 'ḡḡ' in Idoma. Such encouragement led to an official motion by the Elder of Iga Okpaya Circuit Mr Ogbe at the 1979 Synod of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese which was held at the Methodist High School in Iga Okpaya, calling

for the official adoption of *egɔ* as part of the functional arm of the social and communal life of the church in Idoma. After some intensive debates⁴⁰ the Synod resolved that:

Whereas *egɔ*-age groups had been the long standing cultural practice in the Idoma society for mutual collective aid and social activities of the Idoma people,

Whereas some of the activities of *egɔ* conform to the practises of the early church in Acts 2:42-44, and the activities of house churches in Corinthians,

Whereas the adoption of *egɔ* as a social functional arm of the Church in Idoma would enhance mutual fellowship in the church and ease the administration of the church, and lead to closer fellowship among the members of the church,

It is resolved that *egɔ* be adapted by the church as an arm of her social aid group.⁴¹

The resolution was unanimously adopted. Since then, the church has benefited socially, administratively and spiritually from the activities of this social aid group. For example, some such benefits include the dividing up of church members into *egɔ* - age groups for communal labour in the church. Second, each group is chosen in turn to attend distant church funeral services and in representing the church at various levels of inter church meetings. It became very easy for the church hierarchy to assign specific duties to any of the *egɔ*, age groups. It was a case as the Idoma *ita*⁴² puts it, *eyi alawa lɛiyó yá fèkèèè*, that, is many heads makes the load lighter⁴³ As earlier indicated⁴⁴, let us shift our focus to the more crucial roles that the Idoma cultural practices of naming ceremonies, marriage and burial rites played in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

³⁹ *egɔ* is a very highly developed age group aid or club society for social need of the community.

⁴⁰ For details of such debates, see Methodist church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, MCN/BD/ *minutes of Synod*, 1979.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See earlier note on *ita* in chapter 3, p. 84.

⁴³ This proverb is very meaningful to the Idoma, as the Idoma carry their loads on their heads.

7. 3. CHILD NAMING CEREMONY

The birth of a child has a lot of significance for the Idoma people. For example, the birth of a child in the Idoma tradition signifies the time that it pleased the Idoma ancestor to return to the earthly family in a child.⁴⁵ This would be a very exciting moment for the whole family as they anxiously expect this reunion in the birth of a child. The birth of a child as earlier discussed has both a religious and theological significance for the Idoma people⁴⁶. From a religious point of view, both the dead and the living are united again for an earthly family life. This in most cases would be celebrated in sacrifice and worship. Theologically, it shows the Idoma concept of life after death and reincarnation⁴⁷. To the Idoma people, death is only a transition stage between this life and the next. The death of a man does not mean the end to his life. Death in Idoma as the Idoma saying goes, *egwa hila ohi ku nu foofunu ne* - that is: the snake only changes his skin. As earlier observed⁴⁸, they epitomised this in the names they gave to their children at birth, such as *nyil-kwu nyil-wa*, *nyil-igbingbili*⁴⁹, for boys and *anku-le* -the mother of the house is back for the girls.

Because of the religious and theological significance that the birth of a child has for the Idoma people, the naming of that child involves a very elaborate and careful process in Idoma.⁵⁰ A lot of these events⁵¹ that have some significant contribution to the Idoma development of Christianity take place during the naming ceremony.

⁴⁴ See p.279 of this chapter.

⁴⁵ This traditional belief is not unique to the Idoma only, but also to other tribes such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Igala, Nupe and Edo of Nigeria.

⁴⁶ See earlier discussion in chapter 2, p. 47 ff.

⁴⁷ See earlier discussion in chapter 3, on Idoma theology.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ This means a man dies and a man comes, travels and returns like igbingbili that does not die.

Igbingbili is a seed of a tree that never dies no matter what.

⁵⁰ For details of these naming ceremony process, see earlier discussion in chapter 2, p. 49-53

Prior to 1974, the missionaries described the rituals of the Idoma child naming ceremony as “idol worship, evil and satanic”⁵² which every Idoma Christians was instructed not to take part in. Not only did the missionaries forbid Idoma Christians from the practice of child naming ceremony, they did all the could possibly do to stop this practice in the whole of Idoma. Their first approach was to eradicate this custom as they viewed it as sinful and contrary to the word of God.⁵³ Their second attempt was what Groves in his book *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* described as “deferred probation”.⁵⁴ That is, the missionaries had hoped that through education the Idoma would themselves prohibit this rite. The missionary antagonistic attitude toward this important cultural practice, resulted in producing many hypocritical Idoma Christians at that time, as many of them would secretly undertake the cultural practise of the naming ceremony⁵⁵ before bringing such children to the missionaries for baptism.

However, as soon as the missionaries left Idoma in 1974, the Idoma Christians began to think seriously about ways in which Christianity could be made to adapt to this Idoma cultural practice of naming ceremony. This quest on what to do with regards to this matter continued until 1982 when at the annual synod of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese that was held in Methodist Church Ipuke Otukpa that a solution was found when the synod unanimously voted for the adaptation of the cultural rites of the Idoma naming ceremony in place of the service of child

⁵¹ Ibid.,

⁵² Hutchinson Journal 1928.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For details see Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol. Iv:1914-1954, London, Lutterworth.

dedication and thanksgiving of mothers in the Church⁵⁶. A Diocesan Faith and Order Committee was requested to suggest an order of service for the naming ceremony of the child for the following synod. Their recommendations were presented at the next synod in Otukpo in 1983. This was accepted by the synod, resulting in the Order of Service for the Child Naming Ceremony in Idoma. The result of what happened in Idoma spread to other parts of the Conference Area of the Methodist Church Nigeria resulting in the Conference and Order Committee of the Methodist Church Nigeria drawing an order of service for child naming ceremony for the whole country.

The following chart illustrates how Christianity was reshaped to adapt to the Idoma cultural practice of child naming ceremony, there by making itself at home with the Idoma.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See chapter 2, p. 49ff for details of these ceremonies.

⁵⁶ See Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese *Minutes of synod*, 1982.

⁵⁷ The writer thought out this Chart and the subsequent ones in this chapter. In order to fully understand the sequence of events in this chart, see earlier discussion in chapter two, p. 50 ff.

The Sequence of Events in Idoma Traditional Child Naming Ceremony	How Christianity Adapted and Developed these Traditional Events
1. The elders gather in semi circle early in the morning on the day the child is to be named ⁵⁸	The Church elders and Community elders gather in semi circle early in the morning of the naming ceremony
2. The soothsayer requested by the elders to consult the world of the Spirit if it is right for the child to be brought out for the ceremony Libation poured to the ancestors	The Minister is requested to pray before before the child is brought out No libation, but further prayers are made
3. The Child is brought out of the mothers room by a family friend	Child brought out of the mother's room by one of the elders that is specially related to the child 's parents
4. The holy man consults the oracle for the name of the ancestor that returned to the family in the child.	The minister asks for the child's name from the parents of the child.
5. The child is named in the following order	The child is named and dedicated in the following order
5.1. Child lifted up by the priest or the most senior elder	Child lifted by the Minister or an elder in the absence of a minister
5.2. The child while still in the arms of the Priest is given the following symbolic gifts with some words and prayers	While in the arms of the minister, the child is given the following symbolic gifts with some words and prayers
5.2.1 <i>Ikpootuta'</i> symbol of fertility and multiplicity ⁵⁹	<i>Ikpootuta'</i> – prayer of fertility and multiplicity
5.2.2 <i>Ije</i> symbol of wealth	<i>Ije</i> - prayer for wealth and fame
5. 2.3 <i>Een ηkp</i> symbol of friendship	<i>Een ηkp</i> – for friendship
5.2.4 <i>An̄oolé</i> symbol for peace and healing	<i>An̄oolé</i> prayer for peace and healing

⁵⁸ This would normally take place on the seventh day that the child was born.

⁵⁹ These traditional objects used in 5.2.1 to 5.2.6 above are Ikootuta this is a traditional alligator pepper. Others are Ije money; Eenηkp water, An̄oolé a traditional palm oil; Idoma salt, and enme is bitter kolanut.

5.2.5	ᵐā	symbol of sweetness and preservation of the Idᵐa society from decay	ᵐā- prayer for preservation from evil the world, corruption, and a life of holiness in the Idᵐa community
5.2.6	ᵉᵣᵐᵉ	symbol of life, the bitter and sweet aspect of our human life.	ᵉᵣᵐᵉ prayer for life and all the struggles of life
6		The child is shown to the elders, named, and his name repeated three times by all that are present ⁶⁰	The Child is shown round those present by the minister, named and his name repeated three times by the people
7		The priest dedicates the child at Ikpóᵐwᵐ ⁶¹	The minister dedicates the child facing east. ⁶²
8		The child is circumcised, or her ears pierced if she is a girl	Child circumcised or ears pierced if she is a girl.
9		Feasting and celebration	Feasting and celebration

A study of this chart highlights the fact that virtually every sequence of events in the Idᵐa traditional child naming ceremony ritual was adapted by Christianity in order to make itself at home with the Idᵐa people. For example, both patterns involved the gathering of elders at a specific time of the day and in a particular style, invocation and prayers, the bringing out of the child, the assertion of the child's name, the name of the child in a fixed pattern accompanied with symbolic gifts and prayers, the parading of the child for the audience present, and the feasting, celebration and dancing. There was virtually no difference in the cultural pattern from the Idᵐa Christianity pattern apart from the presence of church elders and the minister of the church, and the rejection of the pouring of libation to the ancestors by the Christians.

⁶⁰ The repetition on the name three times, traditionally signifies the Idᵐa recognition of the presence of ᵐwᵐico supreme God, the Ancestors and those in the world of the spirit, and the people present at the occasion. The Christians on their part interpret this to mean the acknowledgement of the Triune God or the Trinity, Father Son and The Holy Ghost.

⁶¹ Ikoᵐwᵐ is the family religious shrine.

⁶² In facing the east, the minister identifies with the Idᵐa belief that life begins in the east, just like sunrise.

Nevertheless, the Idoma Christians did not allow this difference to destroy the major agreement they have reached over this matter. This difference showed how difficult the process on contextualisation could be.

The adaptation of this Idoma naming ceremony by Christianity to translate herself into Idoma context not only resulted in increased church attendance and membership, but contributed immensely to the entire liturgy of the Methodist church Nigeria in the publication of the *Order of the Service of Child Naming Ceremony* by the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church Nigeria.⁶³

A closer examination of this Idoma cultural practice with the biblical traditions reveals something of similarity rather than diversity.⁶⁴ This led us to conclude that had the missionaries to Idoma handled this aspect of Idoma culture and traditions sympathetically, they would have provided a foundation for a positive and effective interaction between Christianity and the Idoma, which would have resulted in a earlier and bigger growth of the Church in Idoma.

7. 4. MARRIAGE

This is the second major contributing factor to Idoma Christianity today. As earlier indicated a lot of work and preparation, coupled with extreme care, is put into marriage process in Idoma.⁶⁵ The missionaries that came to Idoma had a lot of difficulties in accepting or recognising the Idoma traditional marriage and marriage

⁶³ See Methodist Church Nigeria, *Order of Service of Child Naming Ceremony*, Faith and Order Committee, 1978.

⁶⁴ See for example the presentation of Jesus in the Temple with the accompanying gifts in Luke 2:21-39 in which Jesus was presented in the Temple on the eight day according to the Jewish tradition of child's naming ceremony and presentation, and that of John the Baptist in Luke 1:59 on the eight day.

⁶⁵ See earlier discussion in Chapter 2, p. 54-63 for the various stages of the Idoma marriage ceremonies.

ceremonies. They described it as “an idol worship which is not in line with the scripture”.⁶⁶ They described bride price paid to parents as “selling of the Idoma daughters”, and the men who paid the bride price were viewed as “buying” and not marrying their wives.⁶⁷ They therefore insisted that in order for the Idoma young people, who married in the traditional manner to remain Christians, they must not live together as husband and wives even after the traditional marriage ceremonies as permitted within the Idoma culture. They could only do so when they were brought to the church in white western wedding gowns and suits and the western so called ‘ordination of marriage’ vows were taken. The missionaries took such a position despite the fact that a church wedding is neither a necessary part of Christian faith, nor was it an integral part of Idoma. Even though the teaching in the New Testament about Christian marriage is without the slightest allusion to a church wedding ceremony, the missionaries insisted on church weddings in Idoma where such practice is very strange. Failure to carry out a church wedding would result in such marriage not being recognised by the church and the couple concerned would be branded as living in sin. They also stood the danger of being suspended and consequently expelled from the fellowship of the church until such a marriage was regularised in the church according to the missionary standard of marriage

This created a lot of problems for the Idoma Christians and raised some very serious questions as to when is a marriage a marriage in Idoma? Was it when the Idoma young people are married in accordance with the Idoma traditional marriage system or when a western cultural practice of church wedding, that was introduced into

⁶⁶ Hutchinson Diary, 1928.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1930.

Christianity is adhered to by the church in Idoma? The Idoma people were not the only Christians in Africa that were facing this problem of missionaries not recognising their marriage rites and ceremonies. For example, the missionaries that worked in some parts of eastern, central and southern Africa had problems with African traditional marriage. The Anglican churches in these parts of Africa discovered that, the vast problem of suspension from church membership has to do with marriage cases. The so-called 'Christian marriage' was not working in Africa. This led to the commissioning of a special report on Christian marriage in Africa by the Anglican Archbishops of Cape Town, Central Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda chaired by Adrian Hastings at the Lusaka Conference of Archbishops in February 1970 to look at a wider problem of African marriage, such as sex, marriage ceremonies and polygamy.

In his report on Christian marriage in Africa, published as *Christian Marriage in Africa*, in 1973, Adrian Hastings, in locating the missionary problems with African traditional marriage within the historical perspective, suggested that, this problem had been with the church for 144 years at the time of his report. He cited an example in which J.H. Oldham, the first editor on the *International Review of Missions* enquired about the most pressing problem missionaries had throughout the world. The majority of the missionaries, mostly from Africa mentioned the marriage problem.⁶⁸ In such an enquiry a female missionary wrote, "Not only the most pressing, but the most puzzling, the most insistent, the most far reaching of the problems, is that of Christian marriage in the heathen world. It is ever present".⁶⁹ Hastings concluded, "In the

⁶⁸ A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, London, SPCK, 1973, p. 4.

⁶⁹ The *International Review of Missions*, July 1914, p.512, cited in A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, p. 4.

decades before 1914 and the decades since, the same thing has been reported time after time”.⁷⁰

Prior to the Methodist missionaries setting foot on Idoma soil in 1924, they were already aware of the complexity and the perplexity of the issue of the ‘ecclesiastical absolutization of marriage norms which had developed in the course of the centuries in the western church and were now being applied in a very different social and cultural context’⁷¹ such as Idoma. These western marriage norms were monogamy, absolute indissolubility, and the celebration of marriage by Christians in a form recognised by the church.⁷²

While it may be argued that the Christian teaching on marriage from the very beginning was conceived in terms of monogamy, there is no clear condemnation of the African polygamous marriage or polygamy in general anywhere either in the Old or the New Testaments. There were little cases of polygamy in Apostolic times.⁷³ There were no allusions to church weddings anywhere in the New Testament.

Before the missionaries came to Idoma, Christian marriage in Africa as a whole had been given a legal status in most colonial territories by the civil law as “marriage under the ordinance” withdrawn from the authorities of the customary courts.⁷⁴ Any marriage outside this was regarded as not valid. The question that constantly disturbed

⁷⁰ A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, p. 4.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² For classic discussions on these three issues, see Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, SPCK, 1973, especially chapter 1. It is however pointed out that, the concept of ‘absolute indissolubility’ of marriage is not a general western norm of Christian marriage. This is only unique to the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

⁷³ See 1Thim 3:2.

⁷⁴ A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, p. 18.

the Idoma people was, if two Christians sincerely enter into marriage in a clear, traditional Idoma marriage ceremony and openly or publicly manifested such marriage, how could an outsider deny that this is not a valid Christians marriage? Does the presence or absence of white western wedding gown and the church's blessing effect the validity of a marriage? What were the Idoma doing or practising in their traditional marriage rites that would not be found in the Bible, which is the normative and final authority as far as the Idoma Christians are concerned in matters of faith, doctrine, practice or practical Christian living?

The Idoma Christians were not the only Christians in Africa that were concerned about the awkward role of the culturally inappropriate church wedding in African Christianity. For example, in his paper, "For The Sake of Christian Marriage: Abolish Church Wedding" which was later published in *Rites Of Passages in Contemporary Africa*, Klaus Fiedler a lecturer in Church History and Missiology in Chancellor College, University of Malawi, strongly suggested that church wedding should be abolish in African Christianity. He argued, and perhaps, rightly too, that "No Church wedding is needed to make a Christian marriage".⁷⁵ In place of church weddings, he advocated an African tradition marriage to be accepted as a valid Christian marriage. He said, "...Churches should accept any genuine African marriage as valid marriage".⁷⁶ This he further argued would result in what he described as "real inculturation" of Christianity in Africa.⁷⁷ As noted in our earlier discussion⁷⁸ the marriage practice in Idoma was based on parental relationships, family relationships

⁷⁵ Klaus Fielder, "For the Sake of Christian Marriage: Abolish Church Weddings" in *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, James L Cox, (ed.), Cardiff, Cardiff academic Press, 1998, p. 57.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See chapter 2, p. 69-61.

or ties, rituals and religious ceremonies, moral attitudes, hard work, social responsibilities and dowry payments or bride price. Also Idoma marriage is intended to be a permanent union between the man and the woman, the two parental families and relations. It is also related to the continuance of the society, therefore, having as many children as possible is of paramount importance. Childlessness can be a serious problem in Idoma marriage. The same could be said of most of the marriage ceremonies in the Scripture.⁷⁹ Why were the Idoma people treated differently by the missionaries who claimed to be custodians of the scripture being brought to the Idoma people? There is no justification in the scripture for the imposition of western form of marriage on the Idoma people. The battles that were constantly going on in the minds of Idoma young men and women during the missionary period, were as to how they understand themselves as Idoma in relation to marriage, and as to how they realise the missionary ideal of Christian marriage within their own Idoma society and cultural traditional value? From our discussions so far, we observed that as far as the missionaries were concerned, a wedding in the church has been the only symbol of Christian marriage. In keeping the tradition of church wedding in Idoma, the missionaries have pleased only a few at most and truly burdened the majority of Idoma Christians. Idoma Christians who never wed in the church even though they may have lived sound Christian married lives within their cultural context, were considered in the eyes of the missionaries as not being properly married. They were seen to be living in sin and deserved to be cut off from the fellowship and the communion of the church.

⁷⁹ See for example, Isaac 's marriage ceremonies that involved family ties, bride price and religious ceremonies in genesis Chapter 24.

A completely dualized pattern of marriage was imposed on the Idoma to the detriment of the credibility of the Idoma traditional marriage rites and ceremonies. This led many Idoma Christians to reject the church marriage and as result were deprived of communion and full fellowship in the church for having no valid marriage. As a result of the missionary stand on the Idoma traditional marriage, most of the young people in Idoma rejected church marriages in whatever form, and those who accepted the church marriage became hypocrites as they would first of all partake in the traditional marriage rites before turning to the church for the western wedding ceremonies. Once discovered by the church authorities as having subjected themselves to the traditional marriage rites before the church marriage, they would consequently be suspended from the fellowship of the church. The Idoma Christians became very anxious as what to do in resolving this problem, that would enable Idoma Christians to believe and hold their marriages as Christian marriages.

As soon as the missionaries left Idoma in 1974⁸⁰, the Idoma set out very quickly to try to resolve this problem by persuading the church to adapt the Idoma cultural marriage rites and ceremonies in order to solve this painful problem that has been a bottle neck in the life of the church in Idoma. How was this done? At the annual synod of the northern district [now dioceses of the Benue and the North] held in Jos, Plateau State Nigeria this problem was extensively debated after which the synod recommended three options for the church in Idoma as follows,

⁸⁰ See earlier discussion in chapter 5, p. 208-210.

First, that a formula be found where church blessing or marriage vows be inserted within the Idoma customary marriage rites and ceremonies at the home of the bride or the bridegroom with the minister and the representatives of the church present.

Second was for the Idoma traditional cultural marriage ceremonies to be fused with the church service to be held on the day the bride price is being paid at the home of the bride.

The third would be for a church blessing to be given to the couple in the church on some subsequent day.⁸¹

The Church chose the second option and produced the following formula that is illustrated below based on the Idoma cultural context⁸² and their studies of marriages in the Bible.⁸³

⁸¹ Methodist Church Nigeria, Northern District [now Diocese of Benue], *Minutes of Synod*, 1975.

⁸² See earlier discussions on the Idoma marriage in Chapter 2, p. 52 ff.

⁸³ These were the marriages of Isaac in Genesis chapter 24, and that of Jacob in chapters 29 and 30 and the marriage ceremony in John chapter 2, which the committee studied before making their recommendations to the synod. In all of these marriages, especially the ones in the Old Testament, there were parental and family relationship ties that were involved. They also included bride price, religious ceremonies and feasting and celebrations.

Idoma Cultural Marriage Formula	Idoma Christianity Marriage Formula
The man consults parents when woman of choice is found	Man consults parents and church elders when woman of choice is found
Parental investigations	Parental and church elders investigations
Intended couple brought together in the presence of both mothers, during which a proposal is made to the woman in a gift of two kobo, which she accepts, and pass on to her mother if she consents to the marriage	Intended couple brought together in the presence of both mothers and women's fellowship president, during which a proposal is made to the woman in a gift of two kobo, which the woman accepts and passes on to her mother if she consents to marrying her suitor.
Date fixed for dowry payment	Date fixed for dowry payment
Dowry paid in a ceremony that involved the both families and relatives. Woman given to the father of the man to give to his son, elders pronounce blessings, followed with feast, celebration and dances and gifts to the couple.	Dowry paid in a ceremony that involved both families, relatives, the minister and elders of the church. Woman given to the man's father to give to his son, elders pronounce blessings the minister called in and made the couple to reaffirm their commitment to one another and promise to live together for life no matter what in the presence of God, relatives, friends and church elders. This is followed with feast, celebrations, dances and gifts to the couple. ⁸⁴
Animal or bird sacrifice at <i>Ikpów</i>	No animal or bird sacrifice.

This formula seemed in our view to have provided the required bridge between the Idoma and Christianity as far as marriage and marriage ceremony, rites and the validity of marriage were concerned. The Idoma Christians were very pleased with this formula, as they gave away nothing in their cultural marriage practices, except

⁸⁴ During the dowry payment and in all the marriage rites that followed the couple would be dressed in their traditional cloths. For full details of all the sequence of events in the Idoma traditional marriage ceremonies which were adapted by Idoma Christianity, see chapter 2, p.52-61.

that they had to let go with the practice of animal or bird sacrifice at the *ikpo*⊃w⊃.⁸⁵

This formula recognised the use of Id⊃ma traditional cloths at marriages, and there was no insistence on extra church wedding ceremonies. However, there were some older conservative Id⊃ma Christians who would insist on the western style of wedding. Those are in the minority and will hopefully fade away with time from the Id⊃ma church.

It is observed from the chart above that the church was able to adapt the Id⊃ma cultural marriage rites and ceremonies almost in full in order to translate herself into the Id⊃ma context, thereby making herself Id⊃ma Christianity. Such adaptation of the Id⊃ma cultural marriage ceremony by Id⊃ma Christians has many advantages for the church in Id⊃ma. First, it enabled the church to resolve her old missionary problem of the long-standing conflict between the Id⊃ma cultural marriage ceremonies and the western marriage custom that was introduced by the missionaries into Christianity in Id⊃ma. Secondly, the Id⊃ma young men and women who are married under this formula could now live together as husband and wife without any stigma of living in sin hanging over their head, nor were they any longer threatened with being cut off from the fellowship of the church as the result of their marriage, nor were they in any danger of expulsion from church membership. Thirdly, it had economical advantage for the couple and their parents as they would now be hosting only one reception or marriage feast instead of the previous two. Fourthly, there was a 95% reduction in cases of church discipline as a result of the so-called improper marriage according to the missionary ideal of Christian marriage through church wedding. The church was

⁸⁵ This is a family shrine built under a specific tree called ⊃w⊃ meaning source being before which family and other religious sacrifices are performed, giving it the name *Ikpo*⊃w⊃- that is the foot of the

able to translate into the Idoma culture as it had been in the other cultures before it reached the Idoma people. Finally, the community became more involved in the church as their culture was respected and accepted as a pattern of Christian practice and rites, resulting in increased church membership by over eighty percent over a period of seven years.⁸⁶

7. 4. 1 POLYGAMY

Closely related to the marriage problem is the problem of polygamy. As earlier discussed, the Idoma are a polygamous society.⁸⁷ The problem of polygamy is not specific to Idoma Christianity. Adrian Hastings in his report on Christian marriage correctly noted that, “polygamy has been at the heart of the whole marriage debate within the church in Africa from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1970s...”⁸⁸ In his classic discussion of the matter, he outlined this debate in chapter one of his book, and gave a considerable time to the part that polygamy plays in an African society.⁸⁹

Among the Idoma people polygamy is viewed and accepted as permanent union contracted under the Idoma customary rites of marriage and under a form of law. It is recognised by the people as a legitimate marriage that is entered upon with a life-long intention, providing a permanent home for the woman and legitimate status for her children.

source being.

⁸⁶ See Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Archives*, MCN/BD/ Statistics/11/21.

⁸⁷ See earlier discussion in chapter two, p. 53 ff.

⁸⁸ A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage*, p. 72.

⁸⁹ For details please read Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, SPCK, 1973, especially chapters 1-3.

But this was not the position of the missionaries that worked in Idoma. Though, they recognised the problem that polygamy posed in the Christian culture conflict in Idoma, yet no attempts were made to build a bridge between these views. Rather the missionaries in Idoma in line with all other western missionaries of this period emphasised that monogamous marriage is the only one within God's will and should be for all mankind including the Idoma polygamous society.⁹⁰

They therefore, viewed polygamy as sin and adultery. The Idoma on their part viewed polygamy as one form of marriage and monogamy another, with each having their advantages and disadvantages, and they are appropriate to the different societies concerned. Even though the Idoma viewed and accepted polygamy as a normal marriage specific to their society, it was the will of the missionaries that prevailed, resulting in the problem of hypocrisy on the part of Idoma Christians as noted earlier in our discussion.⁹¹ How does Idoma Christianity respond to this issue of polygamy?

At the annual synod of the church in March 1977, held at Jesus College Otukpo, it was resolved that, "detailed attention should be given to the issue of polygamy, with much emphasis on the scriptural position on the matter".⁹² A committee of eight with two members each drawn from the four Idoma Circuits was set up by the synod for this purpose.⁹³ Mr. Agbiti, a school headmaster, chaired the committee⁹⁴. The committee was to carry out some study of the situation having in mind the biblical

⁹⁰ Norcross Journal 1932.

⁹¹ See earlier discussion in chapter 5. P. 188 ff.

⁹² Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Minutes of Synod*, 1977.

⁹³ These are Otukpo, Iga, Odoaba and Igede Circuits. Two of these Circuits have become a Diocese of their own today; these are Otukpo and Igede.

⁹⁴ Mr Agbiti sadly died in 1997 of a heart attack.

position on the matter, and the Idoma cultural context and report their finding to the synod the following year.⁹⁵

After extensive study and consultation throughout Idomaland, the committee came up with the following findings and recommendations,

That the Old Testament presents the Idoma Christians with a number of examples of polygamous marriage, such as the marriages of Abraham, Solomon, Jacob and David. In no place in the Old Testament was the practice of polygamy condemned, but accepted by the Israelite society that practised it.

There is no clear explicit word in the New Testament recognising the existence of polygamy or condemning it.

The committee, therefore reject the missionary position that viewed polygamy as sin, comparable to adultery, and consequently forbade polygamists from baptism, communion and full membership of the church.

The committee affirms that, polygamy is one form of marriage, especially as it applies to the Idoma people, while monogamy is another form of marriage peculiar to the... missionary culture. Each has their advantages and disadvantages and is essential to the different types of societies and cultures. Therefore, to impose on the Idoma Christians who have accepted life long obligations by plural or polygamous marriage, which he is not entitled to withdraw is unscriptural and it is a strange way of preparing people for baptism. Women and children suffer in enforced separation of marriages to meet the missionary baptismal criteria.

To end a polygamous marriage in the name of Christ who said nothing especially to condemn it, at the expense of effecting a divorce, which Christ explicitly forbade, is to pay too high price to adhere to a missionary conformity with one part of the Christian marriage pattern. And to argue that, polygamy makes it impossible for those who believe in Christ to be baptised is not in conformity with the Bible. We recommend that a believing polygamy can be baptised with his wives and children while fully continuing in his polygamous marriage.

However, those who have adhered to the Church's teaching on monogamy and married as such should remain within the bounds of their commitment and not take a second wife for any reason, except for a sympathetic case for Idoma Christians who at present in conformity with their custom decide with the willing agreement of the first wife to take a second wife in the circumstances of childlessness and the widowhood of a sister-in-law.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ For full details of their term of reference, see Methodist Church Nigeria, *Minutes of Synod*, 1977.

⁹⁶ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Report of the Committee on Polygamy* to the Annual Synod of the Diocese of Benue 1978.

These findings and recommendations were accepted by the Synod for implementation after careful deliberations and prayers⁹⁷ However the practice of these recommendations has some advantages and disadvantages for the church. It caused a lot of Idoma people for whom the issue of polygamy had been a stumbling block to their accepting Christianity, to become Christians and thereby increased the church numerically. It also enabled some polygamists who have been denied baptism to accept baptism, and helped eradicate hypocrisy from the church. It also became a divisive issue in the church that resulted in many members leaving the membership of the Methodist church for other denominations⁹⁸ that are completely opposed to polygamy. At the Otukpo synod in 1983 the conflict was finally resolved five years later by the church adopting a position in which polygamists are accepted as adherents, but not full members, while the wife and the children of a polygamous marriage are accorded full fellowship and leadership roles in the church.⁹⁹

7. 5 BURIAL RITES

Another area in which the church adapted to the Idoma people and their culture is in the area of the Idoma rites of *Ikpo daokwuoka*.¹⁰⁰ Before the Idoma ever made contact with Christianity, they would not bury their dead unless there was an oracle in which the ancestors and other divinities are consulted to determine the cause of death. An elaborate ritual of *ikpó da'òkwuòka* would follow this. For the missionaries that worked in Idoma, *ikpó da'òkwuòka* and its ritualistic practices were nothing but “an idol worship, veneration of the dead and superstitious beliefs and practices that must

⁹⁷ See Methodist Church Nigeria, *Minutes of Synod*, 1978.

⁹⁸ These denominations are, The Church of God in Many Lands CMML, and The Assemblies of God Church.

⁹⁹ See Methodist Church Nigeria, *Minutes of Synod*, 1983.

¹⁰⁰ See earlier notes in chapter 2, p. 65.

not be given any place in the Christian church".¹⁰¹ Such reaction from Hutchinson did not come as a surprise. Attitudes of many mainline missionary bodies had been hostile towards Christians taking part in such rituals, even though they were aware that such rituals or related ones were very widely practised in Africa.¹⁰² For the Idoma this was a very crucial and significant practice as it enabled them to uncover the cause of death within their community and provided them with ways of handling the problems that are related to death, such as witchcraft. It allowed the imposition of the appropriate judgement or penalty or fine on whoever the elders judged to be the cause of the death. The Idoma sometimes looked at death as unreal or even unnatural. They express this in the common Idoma idiom when death is reported as *Ikwu nwonu ne okwu a n*, meaning he or she did not die a natural death. Therefore, a solution must be found as to what or who was responsible for such a death. *Ikpo daokwuoka* became the only means of finding this out. This practice also helped them to accept the Idoma person's journey of life from one stage to another.

In 1928, at the missionary consultation meeting in Igwumale, it was decided that Christians should not be allowed to take part in the *Ikpo daokwuoka*.¹⁰³ This created a lot of tension right at the elementary stage of the mission work in Idoma. The missionaries took this stand perhaps, knowing full well that they have little hope of succeeding as this practice forms part of the basic cultural practice that forms the very foundation and the identity of the Idoma people.

The Idoma traditionalists responded by not allowing the Idoma Christians to come to their burials nor participate in any form in the process of grieving or mourning. Even

¹⁰¹ Hutchinson Journal 1928.

when some of the people who died were Christians before their death, Christians would be driven away and in some cases beaten from where the corpse was being buried. There is a popular saying in Idoma, especially among the Otukpo people's elders in relation to this tension between the local people and the Christians,

<i>eko nε ɔyi alɔ yɔeyi a</i>	when our child was alive
<i>o wε aku aa</i>	he or she belongs to you
<i>Ama η abɔalɔbanya</i>	but now
<i>o wε aku alɔ¹⁰⁴</i>	he or she is ours

What the elders meant by this saying was that when our child¹⁰⁵ was living, he disobeyed us and came to you, but now that he is dead he is ours and we will bury him or her according to our burial rites.

Various attempts¹⁰⁶ were made by the church to try and resolve this issue, but it continued to worsen. The questions that come to mind in a situation such as this are, what is a Christian burial? What pattern of burial did the scripture lay down for Christians? Was Christ Himself buried according to the Jewish burial ceremonies or not? What happened at the burial of Christians in the Hellenistic, and Roman world? Was the burial of Christians at that time according to the culture of the people or not? Due to the limitation of this chapter, we could not investigate the scripture in detail in

¹⁰² For a detailed discussion of this argument, see for example, James L Cox, (ed.), *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, Cardiff, Cardiff academic Press, 1998.

¹⁰³ Albert Nwosu's Journal, 1928.

¹⁰⁴ The sayings of the Idoma elders were intended to drive away Christians from their burials. The moment the Christians heard this saying, they had to leave or risked being forcefully driven away.

¹⁰⁵ A child is not understood in terms of age in Idoma. So long as your father is still living you are considered as a child in Idoma. Children are used here to refer to both adults and young people.

¹⁰⁶ Some of these attempts included Christians giving a verbal will to their relatives that when they die, the church would bury them. But, in a situation where the Christians were not even allowed to come to the burial place who would implement such verbal will? Therefore the conflict continues. For example, the writer recalls an experience in 1975 when Mrs ɔηma Obande, whose son was a medical doctor trained in England gave a verbal will to her relatives for her to be buried as a Christian. The attempts to implement such will resulted in an open fight, where we were beaten up and driven away in disgrace.

order to suggest answers to these questions. However, if the answers to these questions are affirmative, why was the Idoma treated differently?

This tension between the Idoma and Christianity in terms of burial rites continued for 50 years until 1978, when at the annual synod of the Church that was held in Methodist High School, Igwumale the matter was finally resolved. After an extensive debate on this issue of constant and sometimes violent clashes between Christians and the Idoma people over burial rites and ceremonies, it was resolved at the 1978 synod of the church that, “a committee be set up to review the Idoma burial rites and find ways in which the church and the Idoma community could come to an agreement.”¹⁰⁷ The committee had one year to report their finding to the synod.

At the Iga Okpaya Synod of 1979, the committee reported to the synod that, “there were open windows of give and take, which if explored, the matter of burial rites in Idoma could be resolved and the church could be seen as belonging to the Idoma people”,¹⁰⁸. This resulted in a bigger committee being set up with membership drawn from all parts of Idomaland and given two years to present their findings to the synod of the church.

After two years of the committee’s work, their recommendations and a working structure were presented to the annual synod of the Church that met at the Methodist High School, Igede in March 1981 as follows,

The committee recommends that, no Christian or non-Christian burial should take place in Idoma land with the ucolo [rituals] of Ikpoelaokwuooka, except the burial of an infant.

We also recommend the following working structure and procedure in the Ikpoelaokwuooka, which in our view took into consideration the Idoma cultural rites of burial and that of the Christian faith that has come to Idoma.¹⁰⁹

A comparative table is provided overleaf.

¹⁰⁷ Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese, *Minutes of Synod*, 1978.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1979.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1981.

The Idoma Traditional Burial Rites	Idoma Christianity Burial Rites
Messages sent round at the news of death, and elders gather in the home of the deceased	Church bell rings at news of the death of a Christian, messages sent round to relatives and near by churches, church elders gather in the home of the deceased
The corpse dressed and seated on <i>Ugāḍā</i> ¹¹⁰ in <i>Itákpa</i> ¹¹¹ with women seated round the corpse, some crying others singing farewell songs	Corpse dressed up, and seated on <i>Ugāḍā</i> in <i>Itákpa</i> , surrounded by relatives and women's fellowship members, singing choruses and dancing
Elders and <i>Ójila</i> ¹¹² gather at <i>ṣpu</i> ¹¹³	Elders, <i>Ójila</i> and Christians gather at <i>ṣpu</i>
Corpse in <i>Itákpa</i> , gifts of money and cloths given to the deceased to use in the next world. Various relatives send messages through the deceased for their relations in the next world	Dead body in <i>Itákpa</i> , gifts of money and cloths given, messages sent through the corpse to the other relations in the next world.
Elders give thanks to the <i>Alekwu</i> ¹¹⁴ and ancestors for the life of the deceased	The minister's opening prayer of thanksgiving for the life of the Christian
<i>Icica</i> songs, and some elderly women sing farewell songs and dance round the <i>Itákpa</i> with their hands on each others waist	Women fellowship sings and dances with other Christians, both male and female round <i>Itákpa</i> . A song of comfort and farewell is sung
<i>Owūnaēkwū</i> ¹¹⁵ appears and demonstrates	<i>Owūnaēkwū</i> appears and demonstrates but mindful of Christians
<i>Ikpó'ḍaòkwuōoka</i> takes place as described on pages 68-74 of chapter two	<i>Ikpó'ḍaòkwuōoka</i> takes place as described on pages 68-74 but with slight variations, for example, no slaughtering of the ram on the grave, but rather cook it for those who came to attend the funeral for them to eat before they return to their homes

¹¹⁰ Ugada is a traditional Idoma chair that only the most senior elder seats on.

¹¹¹ Itakpa is the traditional assembly hall at the centre of the compound.

¹¹² Ojila is the assembly of the people.

¹¹³ The meeting place of the community.

¹¹⁴ For details of Alekwu, see earlier discussion in chapter three, p. 101-104.

¹¹⁵ See chapter 2 p. 69 for details of Owunaekwu.

Corpse placed in pa'^{116} and
akplata and taken for burial
in the grave that is
traditionally prepared

Buried with some sacrifices
of either a fowl or ram or
tortoise

Cidu planted at the centre
grave.¹¹⁷

Corpse placed in pa or coffin and taken
for burial in the grave that is traditionally
prepared

Body buried with no sacrifice, except
animals that are killed for food for those
who attended the burial.

Cross planted at the centre of the
of the grave

The recommendation and the working structure were accepted and adapted by the Synod for implementation. It is observed that both rites involved sending messages to those concerned at the news of death, the gathering of the people, the dressing and seating of the deceased in *Itakpa*, talking to the deceased, songs, sending of messages to relatives in the world of the living dead, thanksgiving, and *ikpelaokwuoka*.¹¹⁸

However, there are slight differences between the both patterns. For example, while in the traditional burial rites, the deceased are buried in pa ; in the Christian rites, they are buried either in pa' or coffin. Secondly, in the traditional rites, there were either animal, bird or reptile sacrifices, in the Christian rites there were no such sacrifices. In place of Cidu in the traditional rites we have the cross in the Christian rites. This is very significant, as Cidu is usually taken from a tree called w , a shrine where children are named at a certain location called *ikpo* w meaning the foot of the source being. According to Idoma tradition, the planting of Cidu on the grave symbolically signifies that one would return to him who is the creator. On the

¹¹⁶ pa is the Idoma traditional burial cloth.

¹¹⁷ Report of the Committee on Burial to the Annual Synod of Methodist Church Nigeria, Benue Diocese that was held at the Methodist High School Aina Igede, March 1982.

¹¹⁸ The practice of *Ikpoelaokwuoka* is not entirely unique to the Idoma people only, but other African countries as well. For example, professor Jude Ongong'a of Kenyatta University, Nairobi Kenya, observed a similar practice among the Luo in his article, "The River-Lake Luo Phenomenon of

Christian part, the Cross among other things symbolises a life of sacrifice, a life that is given in order that others can live. At the burial of Christians in Idoma, a cross is planted at the centre of the grave to symbolise a life given to the deceased and the deceased in turn has to give up this earthly physical life in order to live with Christ. The adaptation of this central cultural issue in the life of the Idoma by the Christians demonstrates yet again how the church was able to translate itself into the Idoma context..

From the chart above, it is observed that Christianity has adapted over 90% of the Idoma traditional burial procedures and events. The Idoma people on their part became comfortable with Christianity and allowed it to penetrate deeper into the society and the Idoma life and culture. For example, they were willing to give up the ritual of animal, bird, or tortoise sacrifice at the burial ceremony of Christians¹¹⁹ in order to accommodate Christianity.

After the initial burial in Idoma, there are still third day, seventh day, fourteenth day and twenty-first day burial ceremonies. Idoma Christianity was able to match this in their third, seventh, fourteenth, and twenty-first day remembrance services of praise and celebrating the life of the Christian whom had gone to be with the Lord. The final issue we will consider in this process of the Idoma development of Christianity is the Idoma Christian liturgy.

Death: A Base for religious intercutors" in *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, James L. Cox (ed.,) Cardiff, Cardiff academic Press, 1998, pp. 224-238.

¹¹⁹ There are still people who would not give up this sacrifice for anything.

7. 6. LITURGY

What do we mean by the Liturgy of Idoma Christianity? For the purpose of our working definition, we would define Idoma liturgy as the Idoma contextual way of approaching $\supset w\supset ic\supset o$ ¹²⁰ 'God'. It is the means by which the Idoma Christians express themselves, especially in a congregational setting before $\supset w\supset ic\supset o$ in their acts of worship. It is also the means by which the Idoma Christians find a link with $\supset w\supset ic\supset o$ and communicate with Him. Taking all these definitions together, by Idoma liturgy, we mean the total Idoma contextual way of worshipping, communicating and approaching $\supset w\supset ic\supset o$ -God.

From the Idoma first made contact with Christianity until 1974 their liturgy fell short of our definitions above. This was because the Idoma liturgy up to 1974 was a simple loyalty to the foreign patterns of worship based on the Methodist Book of Offices imported to Idoma by the missionaries which the Idoma used in their worship without understanding. It was a very frustrating liturgy that did not spring originally from the cultic needs and spiritual temperament or realities of the Idoma people. Consequently, it failed to meet the liturgical needs of the Idoma Christians who became undernourished as result. Just as Idowu when speaking on a related issue about Nigeria in his book, *Towards An Indigenous Church*, which is also applicable to the Idoma situation, correctly noted,

Spiritual suitability for Nigerians is not found in...the Methodist recession of it according to the Book of Offices, as it is imported intact into Nigeria. To the generality of Nigerians, it is fast becoming little more than cold formalism and directed away from their needs.... It was not written for Nigeria and the Nigerians. It was not intended originally 'for export' except probably in so far as it would serve colonists of specific outreaches of England. That is why its

¹²⁰ See earlier discussion on $\supset w\supset ic\supset o$ in chapter 3, p 83-92.

language, its phraseology, its particular references, all proclaim its origin and the end for which it was designed.¹²¹

Christianity in Idoma should be the faith that affords the Idoma the means of worshipping ɔwɔico- God as Idoma, that is, in a way which is compatible with the Idoma spiritual temperament of singing to the glory of God in the Idoma way, such as singing with dancing, clapping of hands, shouts of praise and drums and playing of Idoma musical instruments to the worship of their God. This also includes praying to God and hearing God's word in the Idoma idiom, which is natural and intelligible to them. It should be a faith which is the spiritual home of Idoma Christians, in which they can be said to breath an atmosphere of Idoma contextual spiritual freedom. In discussing this section on liturgy, we will be focusing on one example of the hymnody of the church, in illustrating the weakness of the Western liturgies imported into Idoma, and how Idoma developed her hymnody to make her liturgy distinctively Idoma Christian liturgy.

7.6. 1 Idoma Hymnody

For fifty years the missionaries had imposed on Idoma Christians western music, which they tried fruitlessly to make Idoma appreciate in the singing of such hymns. Time and again, young Idoma Christians have been constituted into an English style choir and have been made to sing complicated English anthems in English which they hardly understand themselves. Perhaps, it would be correct to suggest that, in some of such cases, both the choir and the congregation and even the minister could not comprehend what the song was all about. As Idowu rightly noted, "When hymns,

¹²¹ E. B. Idowu, *Indigenous Church*, p. 27-28.

psalms or canticles are translated from English into Nigerian languages and then sung in European tunes, then we find ourselves attaining the limit of cultic atrocity"¹²²

Various reasons could be given as to the reasons why Idowu reached such conclusions, such as not conveying the right meaning and above all, some of these songs that were imported to Nigeria, Idoma inclusive were poorly translated into Idoma in the *Ije ku aεεo ye ɔgwu Kraist*¹²³ the songs of those who follow Christ are not meant for Idoma. For example, what use is a song such as

From Greenland's icy mountains
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,
From many an ancient river
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain.

What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft O'er Ceylon's isle,
Though every prospect pleases
And only man is vile:
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strewn,
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.¹²⁴

that is lustily sung in Idoma congregations for the wholesale consumption of the Idoma worshippers. A song such as the one cited above is certainly not suitable for Idoma Christianity not only as result of its deflative nuance, but also of its doubtful theology and geography. It is very questionable if it would be suitable anywhere either.

¹²² Ibid., p. 31.

¹²³ This is a portion of selected hymns taken from the Methodist Hymnbook of and translated into Idoma.

¹²⁴ See Methodist Hymn Book,

The question that comes to mind is what was wrong with the Idoma music that it cannot be used regularly in worship in the church in Idoma? What is the matter with Idoma musical instruments such as *uba*, *ɔkanga*, *umolo*, *opo*, *oke*, *engwu*, *ɔgalumpe*¹²⁵ that they cannot be used for worship in Idoma? Why can't the Idoma worship God with the freedom of the spirit and be totally free to worship with their language, body and emotion and really praise God as Idoma rather than the cold motionless, upright standard position of moving up and down on the heels like the missionaries? Why must the Idoma worship God outside the warmth of Idoma context? While it is good to accept some heritage from the cultic life of churches in other parts of the world, such as the Methodist Church in Britain, from which the Idoma church was grown, must we accept what may become thorns and choke the valuable good seed of our own indigenous culture? Are the Idoma not endowed with the capacity to worship God in the beauty of holiness with their own Idoma indigenous gifts and instruments?

When the missionaries left Idoma in 1974, the time then came for the Idoma to make a careful study of what was available on this subject and plan "carefully, reverently, meditatively, and constructively"¹²⁶ to the end that, the best in Idoma culture may be dedicated to the worship of *ɔwɔico*. In our view, the Idoma can only "worship in spirit and in truth"¹²⁷ when such worship is carried out in their own idiom.

Ivan Chetwynd in his late realisation of the importance of the Idoma's own songs and the life that those songs bring to the worship life of the Church and Christianity in Idoma said,

¹²⁵ These are drums, stringed instruments, and horn.

¹²⁶ Idowu 1973:

One hopeful sign for the future is the number of young people being attracted into the church, ... their singing of choruses brings life to the church's worship...and their... dancing and drumming is essential, if the church is to be truly African....the Church in Idoma must be truly African if it is to offer God the sacrifice He wants, which is the whole life of the Idoma people.¹²⁸

Chetwynd was absolutely right in this observation that up to the time of his writing, after 49 years of the church's presence in Idoma, the church life and worship were yet to be Idoma. And that the whole life of the Idoma people was still outside the church. Something had to be done in this regard, but by whom and how?

Many young Idoma Christians soon discovered by themselves that the way to truly worship God in Idoma was through the Idoma context. This realisation led many young Idoma Christians to contextually compose some indigenous Idoma Christian songs for worship. In matters of these indigenous Idoma church music, Alechenu Obiabo¹²⁹, Peter Otulu, Cecilia Daniel and Rev. Ngbede and hosts of others have led the Idoma Christians to the achievement of liturgical worship in indigenous idiom. Some of their inspired contributions form a worthy model for aspirants in other African countries in the field of indigenous hymnography. We have now available in Idoma Christianity indigenous songs suitable for all occasions of church life in Idoma and for regular worship of the church. For example, at the coming of Christ for the Christians we have songs such as

¹²⁷ John 4:24.

¹²⁸ I. G. Chetwynd, *Seed Time*, p. 32.

<i>ɔkpá Aizáya ɛyi ahānɛka</i>	the book of Isaiah chapter nine
<i>ɔgba shilī da alɔka</i>	verse six said to us
<i>Ohigbū alɔ, e lɛ ɔyi ma le alɔ</i>	for our sake, a child is born for us
<i>E lɛ ɔyi ma le alɔ, e e ɔyi ma le alɔ</i>	a child is born for us (twice)
<i>ɔyi nɛo I nya alɔtá</i>	a child that will free us
<i>Iye ku nū wɛ ɔdā idágó</i>	his name is the one that works wonders
<i>Ó kē wɛ ɔcɛnɛyɔpióoo</i>	He is a king, and a person that is forever
<i>Ipú abɔ kú nū nɛ ɔdā dúu yɔ</i>	in His hand is every thing. ¹³⁰

For the social problems of poverty, sufferings and pains in this world, the uselessness of the pursuit of material things, the helpless and hopeless situation of the poor, and life after death the Idoma hope is raised beyond this current world and the next one and the final absolute peace and satisfaction which only ɔwɔico-God gives in the following song

¹²⁹ Alechenu Obiabo sadly died in a tragic motor accident on the 30th of October in 1987, but prior to his death, he had composed many Idoma indigenous songs for worship.

¹³⁰ This song was composed by Mrs. C Daniel in 1976, and later reduced into writing by the Idoma Bible translation office. She has since then composed over two hundred indigenous Idoma Christian songs. This particular song is used during advent.

<i>N le ye ga icō ga aje ipú æɛ nya</i>	I went up and down in this world
<i>N le ye ga ɛɪɔci, ye ga ɛɪɔnē</i>	I went to the east and the west
<i>N le ye ga ɔgáɛɛ ga inyankwūlūmi</i>	I went everywhere
<i>N le ye ga icō ye ga aje ipú æɛ nya</i>	I went up and down in this world
<i>N le ye ga ɔbù ku ɔbaɔI, ye ga ipú een ɲkpɔɪ</i>	I went before trees and rivers
<i>N yɔI da ɪkā ɛga omula ɛnyɔm la abahi</i>	Looking for a place of rest, and pleasure
<i>Aman ɲ Ega omula ɛnyɔ dūuuma</i>	But there is no place of rest
<i>I yɔ æe nōo</i>	in the world.
<i>æɛlɛákanya aaa, æɛēɛ, æɛlɛákanya</i>	The world has problems. (2 X)
<i>ɔnyɛyɔ æɛlɛogwóeyēē eee</i>	Who is in the world that is happy,
<i>Ogwóeyēē nɛ o lɛ unwualu nōo</i>	has joy without problem
<i>nēowu ya ɔI iyē kwuajɛkwuajɛ</i>	that is totally trouble free?
<i>ɔkpá kú Ujòbu ɛyi igwóɛn gba aful ɛ ɔéyi</i>	The book of Job 14:2
<i>ɔcē dūu nɛ é mā wa ipú æɛ nya</i>	Who ever is born into this world
<i>yɔ ipú unwualu kwuɔɔɔɔɔɔ</i>	is in trouble all round.
<i>O ka ɔdāleōjilaeyi ka ɔdā</i>	Ecclesiastes said
<i>okwuɔɔkwuɛyi ipú ɔda nyā</i>	some truth in this matter.
<i>O lɛ ɔdu gwutá ipú inu</i>	The rich man lay in his room,
<i>O goɔda nōo, yɔI je ahɔ ɔɔɔɔ</i>	he did not sleep but listening,
<i>Ohigbū umoto kú nū</i>	because of his vehicles
<i>nēo bá ɔwɛyɔI kwuinya</i>	that are running on the road.
<i>Ohighu agbénú kú nu nɛ ó lɛ aa</i>	Because of his wealth
<i>Acēobi ɔbiipú ba ge ga ojuju ohighū nū</i>	evil people plan toward him.

Ipú eyí kú nu ee ba ge cála ▷▷

Aman'ighibi hú nu

o wεoldá kú ejēgi uwā

cēla ▷le acεkpó y▷I gbo ▷

Acēnē e ba I gbó▷a

y▷I ka obì▷bì kú nū eko ohī

▷w▷ico I gba ▷cεnóo,

▷nyεI gbā ▷cεεε

▷w▷ico I gwó ▷lé nōo,

▷cεle gwó o I ca aa

εgaōmla'eny▷nēn ka mā

▷dan'ηka a le ▷kā da olε▷du

ka le omlá'eny▷o cēnóoo

Oléhá I leije nōo, o le ▷cēnōo,

Ó le unwualu

▷nyεjé oléhá nεo le omulá'eny▷

Eko diuu nεa ma oléhá,

Oléhá y▷ipú aid▷

Ó y▷I ga ojuju kwuotú kwuεn▷

▷wεnēo gé'ya εεka ayipé ▷lénu

ka ee lé'odulé

In his presence, they praise him

but behind him

he is an enemy to all of them,

leading him to hire guards.

His guards

speak evil of him sometimes.

If God does not guard a person

who is to guard that person?

If God does not build a house

and a man build, it will collapse.

Resting-place is what am asking for

If you ask a wealthy person

that has he peace? He will not agree.

The poor has no money.

He is without a person to help,

he has problems.

who knows the poor that has peace?

Any time you see the poor

he is in sorrow,

and in deep thoughts day and night

on how his children

will eat food

Ka anú abĩ iyinu ka o lé éé ka o tũ ili

before he himself will eat and clothe

Ojuju ku nú we aléwaléwa

himself; his thoughts are many

O léeko nēo yɔ ajéne o yɔ

sometimes he sits

Ge je ikwũ ge ka i ĩini

and cries and grumbles:

Eko nyá aa ne owu gēē ya um iye éē

when will I be free of all these

Nēn gee malényɔ ɔɔ, gē lé gē gwá

that I will rest and eat and drink

Ge ka ɔka mal ɔtũnché

and chart with white heart

N geē gbo iyéda gboiyenēē a éē

and sleep in peace?

N ge bi otógwō, bi adaba otemeje

That I will be fully dressed with otogwo,
shoes

Nēn gēē lé ifa yá kpocu kwuēē

and perfumed myself?

ɔda nēo ĩmá oléha ba olihi

But what the poor lacks

kwuēēkwuēē

fills the market and spills.

ɔcēnēo lé ije noó, kwúsha ñoo

The person who is rich and not poor

ɔalaka, ije kú nū je ɔ, ili je ɔ

his money and cloths are enough for him.

O lé unwualu kpɔɔ ekō ohĩ

But he stills has problems, sometimes

O I du ocē, yɔ I ma ɔbū nū

he is sick, looks ahead

Yɔ I kwũ inya ku olé ɔdu

and pursues greater wealth

sha le eyĩ kwu ɔɔ yɔ I nū ɔɔ inya bēē

with poverty pursuing behind.

Agōdō áá bá cēnēo yɔ nyá

There are three beds in this world.

Éei wē agāodo kú ōwē,

One is a bed of suffering,

ɔhá wē agōdō kú abahi

the other is bed of pleasure.

Agōdō kú ikwũ nwuné fiyē éjéji uwa ááá

But the bed of death is the biggest of all.

<i>Amn'ho l'eko n'ε x̄ε ge</i>	But there is a time that a person would
<i>gwutá agôdô ku ôwê</i>	lie in a bed of suffering
<i>Ô kē ε eko n'ε x̄ε ge gwutá agôdô kú abahi</i>	and sometimes bed of pleasure,
<i>εga o lā áá n'ε alɔ l'ε x̄ε nya aa</i>	there are three place to live in life,
<i>ɔ l'ε n'ε ac ε bī ab̄ le gwó'</i>	the house built with human hand
<i>n'ε ac ε lā ipú nū</i>	that people live inside,
<i>ɔ l'ε ɔwɔico l'ε fú n'ε ac ē bá ipú aidɔ</i>	the house of God you are powerful
	in which people are sighing;
<i>Ac ē bá ge d'ε εgba ɔwɔico agb'εgb'ε</i>	where people are shouting, God thou art
	powerful!
<i>ɔwɔico agb'εgb'ε, ɔwɔico a l'ε fú gb'oo</i>	God you are mighty, and indeed
	thou have power.
<i>A le y'ε ga inu'aci, inu'agbá a I p'ó áá nya</i>	If you go to the hospital and prison
	you will hear this words
<i>εga oolā ɔm áá w'ε ɔl'εkwū, ip'ueb'utu</i>	The third place, is home of the dead
<i>Ip'ú un'oh'ji, aj'ε x̄ε'</i>	in the grave and home of the ancestors
	And heaven
<i>εga n'ε o l'εshá, n'ε ol'εɔdu ȳ</i>	where both poor and rich live
<i>ɔdā diu n'ε w'ε, a gē lā ɔ l'ε nya</i>	whatever you are, you will live
	in this house
<i>A ɔ x̄ε'ku x̄ε je ɔkwuje ɔkwu</i>	the big fat, fat kings of the world
<i>E le y'ε εε</i>	have gone.
<i>á'ε le lá àkpá, a l'ε ɔjá má' a yá uf̄i ɔjá'</i>	If ants eat a clay pot, when you see
	a calabash, you fear for it

<i>Owu lε æ̃je gã ge bi εε' ohimini</i>	the wind has carried the stone for ever
<i>N himmā I da ̃kã, lε eyi tā ajε</i>	I have been looking, and watching
<i>K n' pō ̃k̃nεo I ka dā ka</i>	to hear the voice that will say
<i>Owu yεum iyê kwuajεkwuajε</i>	I am completely free and peaceful
<i>N lεunwualu nōo, ami mla ikwū wε ̃ya</i>	I have no problem, death is my friend
<i>N pō ̃kc diū nōo, acē lεunwualu</i>	I have not heard any voice
	The world has problems
<i>Ogbēee kū ikwū m'ēiē</i>	It is beyond death
<i>Al̃ lε eyi ce ka omolānỹ</i>	that we hope that there is rest and peace
<i>ỹ lε al̃.¹³¹</i>	For us.

The analysis of this song revealed many things about Idoma Christianity. From this song and other related ones, we observed that Idoma Christianity relied very heavily on the scripture for their liturgy and some of their theological articulations. It is very difficult generally to find an indigenous Idoma Christian song that will not take you directly to the scripture, or without making reference to the scripture. Most of the songs that were contextually composed were based on the Idoma concrete historical situations and the Bible. It could be convincingly suggested that the Idoma Christians are Bible-believing Christians. Those who couldn't read the translated Idoma Bible kept the Bible text in the power of their memory. Although one is aware of the likelihood or potential failure of the power of memory sometimes, however in the

¹³¹ This song is a literal transcript of a tape recording during fieldwork in Otukpo with Mr. Peter Otulu on the 26th August 1997. Though, this song and many more of its type are not published in book form yet, they are in wide circulation in all the churches of all denominations in Idoma. It is retained in the memory of the worshippers so they don't need the written form at the moment. But as the power of memory sometimes fails, it is hoped that this song and others will soon be published in a book form and circulated in all the churches in Idoma.

Idoma situation it is a very effective means of holding on to what the Idoma Christians call *dā kú ḡwɔico*-the word of God.

Secondly, we observe in these songs some articulations of Idoma Christian theology. For example, in the first song, we observed the Idoma through their indigenous Christian song enunciating that Christ has come to free them. We must be however cautious here as the theme of freedom has been a matter of theological controversy among scholars. For example, while the South African Christians in most cases perceived such freedom from the political perspective and viewed freedom in terms of freedom from apartheid oppression, the Idoma in most cases viewed such freedom that Christ brought at his coming as freedom from witches and witchcraft, pains and sickness, sufferings and economic hardships and all the ills that surround them.

From the second song it is noted that, only God has the ultimate ability to solve human problems. This was reflected in such idioms as *ḡwɔico I gbā ccε ḡ, ḡnye I gab ɔcε? ḡwɔico I gwó ɔlé'noó, ɔcεle gwó ó'le ca.*¹³² The Idoma therefore perceived God as the final answer to all their problems.¹³³ One may however ask what of the Idoma ancestors? What use are they to the Idoma Christians? Have they any role to play in the life of the Idoma Christians? Although the Idoma generally believed in the social, economic, defensive, protective, preventive and productive benefits of the ancestors, and other blessings they bring to the Idoma society, they perceived their ancestors as a link between them and *ḡwɔico* as well. The Idoma

¹³² That is if God did not guard a person who else is there to guard a person, if God does not build, no matter a man's effort it will fail.

¹³³ See earlier discussion in chapter three for full details of this view.

ancestors, perhaps as in other African countries, were not viewed as an end in themselves, but a means to an end.¹³⁴

And such “end” as far as the Idoma are concerned is *ɔwɔico*-the supreme God.

We finally observed from this song that, the Idoma Christians viewed this physical world as a temporal world that is full of trouble and difficulties of which no one is free from, not matter one’s class or status. However, beyond this temporal physical world there is the next world into which all human beings enter only through the transitional death. In that world *ɔwɔico* gives us absolute peace, rest and happiness.

In Idoma today, there is a lot of indigenous music being produced by enthusiasts of church music in Idoma.¹³⁵ Many of the songs they sing take us straight to the scriptures as we read or sing them. In most cases, the songs are paraphrases of Bible stories or a believer’s commentaries on the great themes of the Bible. Others as already described are testimonies to the saving power of Jesus Christ and prayer at the same time such as *Ádā, Lé alɔnya* Father deliver us by Alechenu Obiabo and for God’s providence *o le ya gam ee*-He has done it for me by late Mrs. *ɔbaiya Kwukwura..*

Worship in the church in Idoma today in most cases has become spontaneous as a result of these songs, which are joyous with an unmistakable note of assurance and

¹³⁴ See earlier discussion in Chapter 3, p.101-105, for the Idoma belief on the Ancestors.

¹³⁵ For example, in times of sickness, there is a song based on the narrative of Hezekiah in Isaiah by Mr Adigwu. During marriages, we have *ɔba mla ɔnya*-husband and wife by the same man. For testimonies of the great things *ɔwɔico* has done, we have songs such as *Aa wa gaa ma ɔɔda ne o ya ga um aa*- You come and see what he has done for me, and during Child naming ceremony, we have *ɔyi weku ɔwɔico*-Child is a gift of God. In times of difficulties and spiritual battles, we have *ɔwɔico Ada eee Ada Lé alɔnya*-God our father, father deliver us by Alechenu Obiabo.

victory that God has given them, over Satan, the forces of evil, witches and witchcraft; victory in fact over all that has been holding the soul in spiritual thralldom. This assurance has overcome the dissatisfaction which the Idoma felt as a consequence of the sterility, and coldness of the church's liturgical life as introduced or imported into the Idoma church by the missionaries.

The Idoma had a certain emotional depth, which, in the words of Idowu, "the prefabricated imported liturgies did not reach".¹³⁶ Therefore, when the missionaries left, the Idoma Christians became free to express their faith within the Idoma context, which manifested itself in hymns, choruses composed in the Idoma idiom and music with Idoma musical instruments¹³⁷ augmented with clapping and dancing. Such hymns and worship in our view will naturally strike the appropriate tone in the Idoma heart; they spread like bush fire and became sources of day to day encouragement and inspiration among the Idoma Christians. When worshipping in such an atmosphere, the Idoma are deeply stirred or moved and engrossed in their worship. Here we have at last in Idoma Christianity, a worship that touched those Idoma intellectual, spiritual and emotional depths, which the alien liturgies introduced by the missionaries, could not reach. These latest developments in Idoma Christianity were enhanced by the impact or effect of the Idoma Bible translation.

¹³⁶ E. B. Idowu, *Indigenous Church*, p. 43.

¹³⁷ For some of these musical instruments, see earlier note on p. 313.

7. 7. A specific reference to the Effect of the Idoma Bible Translation

This section had already been briefly discussed in our earlier discussion on the value of Bible translation and the Idoma language in chapters three and six the latter being specifically on translation. As a result we will not be discussing this section in great detail, other than arguing that the impact of the Idoma Bible translation has helped Idoma church to adopt the indigenous terms, concepts, customs and idioms for the central categories of Christianity in Idoma, such as theology, liturgy and worship as discussed in this chapter. It also enabled the Idoma Christians to challenge some of the western interpretation of Christianity, and contextually move to develop Christianity that suits the Idoma needs.¹³⁸

The Idoma Bible translation has helped the Idoma Christians to criticise the western form of worship and church services, with the Idoma churches maintaining that the missionaries were unfaithful to the scriptures, which call for dancing, clapping of hands and music in worship and praise as recorded for example in I Samuel 18:6; Psalms 149:3; and Psalm 150. In the Scripture, the Idoma Christians were enabled to find a stream in full spate and no amount of missionary upbringing or resistance could stand on their way in their liturgical development and the contextualisation of Christianity that suit the Idoma needs. The Idoma church, though retaining some aspects of the worship pattern they have inherited from the missionaries such as singing from the hymn book, scripture lessons, and sermon, has introduced a lot of indigenous elements in their worship pattern today. These include, shouting alleluia during worship, dancing and clapping of hands, drumming and using other indigenous

musical instruments in worship, open testimony of the Lord's victory over Satan by the worshippers during service, saying 'amen' as much as possible in the middle of prayers and a loud final 'amen' at the end of prayer and preaching of longer sermons.

The scriptural translation helped Idoma to preserve their name for God *ɔwɔico* and the religious and social words that depended on that. All these and others as earlier discussed highlighted the fact that instead of Christianity changing or robbing Idoma of their way of life, the Idoma people succeeded in uniting Christianity with their indigenous culture involving language, burial, naming ceremony, marriage and theological reflections and interpretations.

This chapter began by arguing that Idoma Christianity should bear the distinctive stamps of indigenous originality, in terms of primal beliefs, cultural practices, customs, rituals and liturgy. We noted that, even though, the church was present in Idoma since 1924, it never penetrated the Idoma life and context until after 1974 when the missionaries left Idoma and the leadership of the church in Idoma fell on the indigenous minister.

We examined the cultural process through which the Idoma came to terms with Christianity. To illustrate our discussion on how the Idoma people re-shaped Christianity to suit their Idoma needs, three rites of passages: child naming ceremony, marriage and burial rites were examined. In discussing these rites, we highlighted the problem of contextualising Christianity in a given culture. We noted that the

¹³⁸ See for an example our earlier discussions on Child naming ceremony, burial and marriage ceremonies, and other related issues such as polygamy, in which the Idoma were able to turn to the

adaptation of these rites by the church in Idoma not only enabled the church to translate itself into the Idoma life, culture and traditions, it contributed immensely to the liturgy of the church in the publication of the Order of Service of Child Naming Ceremony for the entire Methodist Church Nigeria.

In our discussion of liturgy, we argued that the western imported liturgies into Idoma were not compatible with the Idoma spiritual temperament of worshipping such as singing with dancing, clapping of hands, shouts of praise, drumming and playing of other indigenous musical instruments. We noted, how the Idoma developed her hymnody to make her church music distinctively Idoma. The Idoma church by doing so overcame the dissatisfaction, which they felt, as a consequence of the sterility and coldness of the church's liturgical life imported into Idoma by the missionaries.

We concluded that at last there is in Idoma Christianity a liturgy that touched the Idoma intellectual, spiritual and emotional depths, which the imported alien liturgies could not reach, resulting in a considerable growth of the church in Idoma today. The average church services and worship life of the church in Idoma today differs considerably from that of 20 years ago in terms of church music that is specific to the Idoma style of singing, longer sermons, and the overall worship structure of the Church, that is not only limited to the Methodist church, but applicable to all the other denominations in Idoma today. We argued that all these latter developments in Idoma contemporary Christianity was influenced by the effect of the Idoma Bible translation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

As we approach the end of the 20th century, we have got to remember that Christianity was introduced to the Idoma as recently as 1924 by the Methodist missionaries.¹

Since the missionaries left Idoma in 1974² a lot of changes have taken place in the church, which have made it fundamentally different from the type of Christianity that was introduced to the Idoma people. Some of these changes can be seen in the pattern of church worship, liturgy, church music, and the use of the Idoma language in the Idoma church today.³

Before we later return to these changes⁴ let us briefly draw our attention to preceding discussions in this thesis. The introduction of this thesis began by noting that the records of the 19th century inflow of missionaries to Nigeria had been preoccupied predominantly, with the history, reception and development of Christianity among the Yorubas, Igbos and Hausas, and other southern parts of Nigeria to the utter neglect of the middle belt area and especially the Idoma people. Where we have any account at all of the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity, such stories would stem from the missionary perspectives, resulting in a Euro-centric understanding of Idoma and what happened in Idoma in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity.⁵

We argued for the need for the Idoma historical and cultural understanding in the

¹ See chapter 4, p. 125-128.

² See chapter 5 & 7.

³ See chapters 6, 7.

⁴ See pages 297-323.

⁵ See chapter 1, p. 2ff

Idoma reception and development of Christianity, which emphasised the Idoma point of view in the interaction between the Idoma and Christianity.⁶

We also noted the lack of cultural cohesion, which the Idoma people needed to adapt Idoma Christianity. The Methodist missionaries treated the Idoma, we observed, as having no religion, language, tradition, institution and racial character. And as a result, the Idoma people felt deculturised and denationalised as Idoma in embracing Christianity, which was presented to them by the Methodist missionaries as an inseparable part of the western cultural inheritance.⁷

We argued that the adaptation of the Idoma culture as the only viable means of rendering God's message in the Idoma context, would result in an effective indigenous reception and development of Christianity among the Idoma people.⁸ It was argued that Christianity should be part of the Idoma culture, rather than adopting a foreign culture to put Christianity into Idoma. If Christianity is to take hold in Idoma, we argued it could only do so in and through the Idoma receptor culture.⁹

Attention was drawn to the need to view the important role of the Idoma people not merely as objects of evangelism by the overseas missionaries, but subjects in a process of dynamic religious change, who should be able to initiate policies as well as following those introduced by the missionaries.

⁶ See chapter 1, p. 6-7.

⁷ See Chapter 1, p. 4-5 and chapter 4; See also, chapter 5, p. 167-171.

⁸ See Chapter 7.

⁹ Ibid.

In our discussion of Idoma ethnicity, and the cultural characteristics which are unique and common to the Idoma people,¹⁰ the discussion focused on the problems of the development of ethnicity and how to understand a non-literate society whose identity is based mainly in memory, the language, social culture and traditions of the people. We argued that, the question of origin could not be satisfactorily answered from sociological and anthropological investigations, but rather through the active participation in the life and culture of one's own people.¹¹

In locating the Idoma people, we observed that, the Idoma live on a strip of land that stretches from the southern bank of river Benue to the northern fringes of Igboland, with a population of over one million people. The Idoma we argued have a common tradition that recognises Apa as their ancestral homeland.¹² We rejected Dr. Erim's "Idu putative father"¹³ theory of the Idoma on the grounds that his theory was not based on the Idoma context, either written or oral, but rather on some early colonial anthropologists who collected the so called Idoma genealogies which have no historical or contextual support or oral evidence in nineteen of the twenty two Idoma districts. We examined an authentic Idoma oral history-the *Alekwu Abɔje*¹⁴ chant in order to establish the Idoma pre-colonial identity and origin. We concluded that the Idoma came from Apa in the defunct Kwararafa Jukun Kingdom, and settled at different periods in history in the present day Idomaland.

¹⁰ See chapter 2, p. 21ff.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See earlier discussion on 26ff.

¹³ Ibid., See also E. O.Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, p. 9ff.

¹⁴ See, pp. 35-37 for details of the Alekwu Aboɔje chant.

Our attention was turned to the religious, metaphysical and philosophical factors that helped us identify Idoma theology which we defined, discussed, explained, evaluated and compared to other forms of primal theology.¹⁵ We argued that the Idoma primal theology had its sources in Idoma history, language, culture, arts and music with its basic creeds and beliefs that are traditionally passed on from one generation to another.

We examined the basic structures of Idoma primal theology, which we argued consisted of a belief in *ƆwƆico*-the Supreme God. In discussing *ƆwƆico*, we argued that God was present in the Idoma world view, religious beliefs and practices, arts, music and epistemology before the Idoma ever made contact with Christianity. Belief in divinities such as *ƆwƆ*, *Aje*, *Alekwu* etc., with each of these divinities being concerned with the Idoma local situations in the ordering of the Idoma total communal life. The world of the spirit, worship and sacrifice, life after death and reincarnation.

In discussing worship, which we defined as Idoma's acts of turning to God¹⁶, we observed seven main features of Idoma worship. These are: liturgies, *Inalegwu*-prayers, *eya*-sacrifice, *ehi*-offering, the objects of worship which is *ƆwƆico*-the supreme God and *Alekwu*-the ancestors, the place of worship and sacrifice, and the participants which included the worshippers, the divinities and the supernaturals.

¹⁵ See chapter 3, p. 80-83.

¹⁶ See chapter 3, p. 108

In our examination of the Idoma world, life after death and reincarnation, we noted that the Idoma world in all its totality has two aspects, namely: the world of man and the world of the spirit. We observed that to the Idoma, death does not “write ‘the end’ to human life, but reopens to the hereafter”¹⁷. And as a result, the departed relatives can return again to this visible world in a baby.

The Idoma as discussed,¹⁸ are solid and unshaken in their religious beliefs. To the Idoma people, their religious beliefs are objective and unquestionable truths. It could be suggested that these are much more than objective. Religion to the Idoma is life, comfort, power and blessing. We argued that these Idoma religious experiences are realities that must be appreciated in the Idoma interaction with Christianity.

This Idoma primal theology contains a coherent body of belief and an interpretation of life, which alone can provide the foundation for the true or genuine interaction between the Idoma and Christianity. An awareness and appreciation of the Idoma primal theology, we argued, would provide us with the main vehicle for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.

In discussing the first point of contact between the Idoma and the Methodist missionaries,¹⁹ we noted two areas of difficulties: these were language and the site of the missionary residence. While the efforts of the Methodist missionaries in learning, reducing into writing some aspects of Idoma language, and venturing a translation in the Idoma language were highly commendable, the choice of the first site, we argued,

¹⁷ Awolalu cited in J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, p. 230.

¹⁸ See chapter 3.

was intentionally situated at the religious site of the locals, resulting in the relocation of the people's sacred shrine for the missionary residence. This, as we noted, resulted not only in the first conflict between the missionaries and the Idoma, but also in many of the locals turning their back on Christianity.²⁰

In our evaluation of the missionary perception of the Idoma people, we observed that the missionary image of the Idoma, their religion, past values and culture was very negative, and received a very unsympathetic dismissive, and condemnatory attitude from the missionaries.²¹ These Methodist missionaries, we argued, seemed possessed by such an unbounded feeling of cultural superiority over the Idoma, that they were unable to understand and appreciate any cultural value in Idoma. They failed to understand that there is an Idoma state of mind and Idoma perception of life. It was a mistake, as we noted, on the part of these Methodist missionaries to purposefully stamp out with some degree of success, the Idoma past values and replace them with their own. We argued that the Idoma individuality, community, mental and emotional attitude, past heritage and cultural practices would form the best basis for the Idoma reception and development of Christianity.²²

We suggested that these negative missionary feelings toward the Idoma people, their culture and traditions, were perhaps a carry over of the general feelings that existed about Africans in the western world at that time and the social situations of the lower

¹⁹ See chapter 4, p. 133-137.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., See also chapter 1 & 7.

working class in their home country at that time that were imported and transferred to the Idoma people their culture, religion, context and past values.²³

The missionary failure in understanding the Idoma past values and culture, and their insistence on the Idoma replacing their culture, traditions and values with that of the western missionaries, created a state of tension between Christianity and the Idoma people, whose lives lie in their primal religion and their cultural practices. We argued that, for Christianity to better and effectively interact with the Idoma people, it must realise that the Idoma had their own past, religion, culture and tradition, which must be respected and appreciated. The Idoma past is very important for a comprehensive understanding of the Idoma now and their new religious experience.²⁴

In our examination of the spread of Christianity in Idoma and the use of mission education between 1924-1974 as an agency for evangelism,²⁵ we evaluated in particular the aims and methods of mission education in Idoma in its various stages. We observed that the Methodist missionaries who were responsible for the Idoma education seemed to have intentionally destroyed all forms of Idoma life for their mission success story. For example, we noticed in Idoma, both teachers and pupils were forbidden from the use of the Idoma language in the school.²⁶

The Idoma language was completely banned as a medium of education, and what is worse, Idoma school pupils were encouraged to lay aside their Idoma names, dress,

²³ See T Jack Thompson, "Missionary Attitudes to African Culture", Class note, 31st January 1996. See also, General William Booth, *Darkest England*.

²⁴ See chapter 7.

²⁵ See chapter 5, p. 165 ff.

and way of living for western ones. They were taught to view their social ideals, traditions, music arts and religion as ridiculous and sinful. Perhaps, the Methodist missionaries did this in the belief that only the disintegrated, denationalised and deculturised Idoma person would be a suitable object of mission work. This we argued was a mistake on the part of the Methodist missionaries. The later Idoma response to and development of Christianity²⁷ has proven the missionaries wrong in their attempt to take the Idoma people out of their context in embracing Christianity.

We argued that by and large, the aims and methods of missionary education in Idoma in teaching the Idoma children mathematics, biology, European history, English and French, and in imposing fines for the use of the Idoma language in schools were to break up as much as possible the Idoma traditional way of life, culture and language, and replace it with that of the west. It would be a sad situation and great pity if in the tide of mission education in Idoma, the Idoma life, and culture and past values were lost in the imitation of the western methods. There is nothing more untidy than to see an Idoma person dressed in European cast off clothing or more sickening than a young Idoma person trying to be an Englishman, when he should be an Idoma and proud of his Idoma nationality and identity. As correctly argued by Fraser in our earlier discussion, the Idoma should have been educated without taking them out of their African culture and environment.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See discussion in chapter, seven, especially, p. 278 ff.

²⁸ Fraser, "Aims and Methods of Missionary Education", *International Review of Missions*, 1925, p. 517.

Ironically, while the Methodist missionaries were thinking of education in Idoma, the entire western missionary body was debating and thinking about what to do with education in Africa. The educational conferences²⁹ of the 1920s about the aims and methods of mission education in Africa, came up with valuable suggestions on the adaptation of an African educational programme that would take into consideration the African situation in focusing mainly on the African character, health, agriculture, skill and family life.³⁰ An educational programme that would be tailored to the African needs as against the unsuitable western style of education. But sadly the Methodist missionaries to Idoma who, probably, were aware of these concerns before they made contact with the Idoma failed completely in the next fifty years of their educational programme in Idoma to take into serious consideration any of these concerns in their educational policy in Idoma. The Idoma needs, language, culture, village or local situations we argued, were left out of the missionary educational activities in Idoma, which they tailored primarily at producing teachers, preachers and local missionaries who would spread Christianity in Idoma.³¹

We focused on contextual factors in the Idoma reception and development of Christianity. The analysis focused mainly of Bible translation.³² We argued in this chapter that the effective cultural contextualisation that the process of the Idoma reception and development of Christianity required could only be achieved by a culturally attuned re-translation of the Bible using the principle of dynamic cultural

²⁹ See T. Jack Thompson, *Northern Malawi*, p. 239ff; K.J. King, *Pan Africanism and Education*, Oxford 1971.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Chapter 5, p. 165-166.

³² See chapter 6, especially, p. 214-250.

equivalence.³³ This we argued would “invest Idoma Christianity with indigenous solidity”.³⁴

We pointed out that if Christianity is to be truly part of the Idoma people, it must be presented to the Idoma in their tongue and culture, without which, Christianity would be standing behind a closed door in Idoma.³⁵ We then went on to observe the value of Bible translation in the spread of Christianity and the contribution it makes in the recovery and preservation of the cultural identity of the people. We argued that, if Christianity is to have any form of grip and preservation in Idoma at all, it could only do so in and through the translation of the Bible into the Idoma language.³⁶

In discussing the history of the Idoma Bible translation, apart from giving a descriptive account of the events that took place, we critically evaluated how the Idoma New Testament was translated. We noted the problems of literalness, unreadability and clear natural meaning in Idoma. We argued that while we commended the efforts of the missionary translators of the Idoma New Testament, we however noticed that they did not base their translation on any principles of translation, nor did they take into any serious consideration the problem of inculturating Christianity into Idoma.³⁷ These we believed were not sufficiently looked at either scientifically, ethnographically, linguistically, historically or in cultural terms, resulting in the failure of execution of the Idoma New Testament.

³³ See chapter 6, p. 236-239.

³⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, p. 70.

³⁵ See chapter 6 & 7.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See for example, Norcross's admission as discussed on p, 218-219.

In our discussion of the Old Testament translation, we noted and examined the problem of the interaction between the source language and the receptor language, text and meaning. We argued for the translation of the Old Testament on the principle of natural dynamic cultural equivalence.³⁸ In applying this principle in translating the Bible, we however, cautioned that care must be exercised when translating, especially the meaning of the text in order to distinguish what the authors of the biblical text are really saying from forms of expression, idioms, imageries of the receptor language. A careful study of languages and historical contexts, we argued, are foundational to correct translation of the scripture into a given language on the principle of dynamic cultural equivalence. The constant question to be asked would be, 'what would this text have meant to a person living at the time of the source language and culture', before re-expressing it in the receptor language and culture and concluding, 'this is what is said now in the receptor language and culture?'

We further discussed how the unreadability of the New Testament was corrected through the establishment of the Idoma orthography that took into consideration the various dialectical factors of the Idoma language. With the orthography in place, and following the United Bible Society's organising and working plans of Bible translation project³⁹ we observed how the translation was completed in the Idoma cultural receptor language with a notable impact and effects on Idoma Christianity and the Idoma community as a whole in liturgical, theological and cultural terms.⁴⁰

³⁸ See chapter 6, p. 236-239.

³⁹ See chapter 6, p. 250 ff.

⁴⁰ See our discussion in Chapter seven.

Our examination of Idoma Christianity today, focused on the cultural process through which the Idoma re-shaped, developed, and came to terms with Christianity within their cultural context that suited the Idoma needs, customs and traditions.⁴¹ We highlighted how the Idoma were able to persuade the church to translate itself into the Idoma culture and life. In doing this we argued, the Idoma regained the cultural cohesion they earlier lacked in adapting Christianity and spreading it among themselves.

We asked, why, for fifty years, the Idoma people were treated differently by the missionaries in comparison with God's people in the Bible who shared with other ancient peoples many customs and traditions that were unique to those cultures?⁴² For example, in the Old Testament, *apiooh* & circumcision⁴³, marriages and bride price⁴⁴, and similarly *ikpoona*-washing of feet were current cultural practices. In other instances, the Biblical writers used existing cultural materials to express their messages. Leviathan a Babylonian mythological sea monster is mentioned five times in the Old Testament.⁴⁵ And in the New Testament, many Greek words and images were taken over by the Apostles to express Christian concepts, for example, *kurios*-Lord and *logos*-Word;⁴⁶ *musterion* was used by mystery religions to refer to the initiating process by which adherents could gain divine knowledge. Paul took hold of this word and christianised it.⁴⁷ From these examples, it is obvious that God takes human culture seriously. We are in complete agreement with the Indian theologian

⁴¹ See chapter 7.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Genesis 17:10-14.

⁴⁴ Genesis 24; 28; and 32.

⁴⁵ Job 3:8; 41:1ff; Psalm 74:14; 104:26; Isaiah 27:1.

⁴⁶ St John's Gospel chapter 1.

⁴⁷ Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; 6:19.

Ananda Kumar, when in a paper, "Culture and the Old Testament" presented at the Willowbank Consultation he stated,

Culture, with all its merits and limitations, has played a fundamental role in God's self-disclosure in human history. Divine revelation does not come in a vacuum. It can only come with reference to culture, that is in relation to the religious environment, language and understanding of man: otherwise we could not understand it. It is the greatness of God's mercy that he voluntarily limits himself to the vehicles of human culture to make himself known.⁴⁸

Kumar's view did not run counter to the Bible. Christianity as whole has been a translatable religion as Lamin Sanneh in his discussion on the translatability of Christianity into various cultures in his book, *Encountering The West and Translating the Message*, made us to understand.⁴⁹ Christianity took its root in Palestine from where it translated itself to Africa, Asia Minor and Europe. It therefore cannot be doubted that the Idoma life, context, language and culture, was for us the mother soil into which the seed of the gospel should be planted especially through Bible translation and out of which a Christian society would grow in Idoma.

However, in using the existing Idoma culture to express the Christian message in Idoma, we must be cautious in our approach. It is not always very easy to find a dynamic cultural equivalence or practices in putting Christianity into that given culture. Richard H. Niebuhr's three basic positions of Christ against culture, Christ in culture and Christ above culture⁵⁰ should be our guide on how we view and use culture in putting the Christian message among a given people.

⁴⁸ A.Kumar, "Culture and the Old Testament" in Coote, R. T & Stott, J R (eds.), *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB Eerdmans, 1980, p. 9.

⁴⁹ See Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering The West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1993, especially Chapter 1.; See also *Translation the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1993.

⁵⁰ For details of this argument, see Richard, H Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1953.

We argued that, even though, Christianity was present in Idoma land since 1924, it had never really made a decisive penetration into the Idoma life, culture and context until after 1974 when the missionaries finally left Idoma, and the leadership of the church came to the Idoma indigenes.⁵¹ Kenneth S. Latourette was right in his observation when he convincingly noted, in his article, “Indigenous Christianity in the Light of History” in *International Review of Missions*, that “When the leadership [of the church] continues to be foreign...Christianity at best is passive. If Christianity is to become ‘indigenous’ among any people it is through the evoking and training of...[indigenous] leadership”.⁵²

Since the leadership of the church in Idoma came to the Idoma people, we argued that the Idoma discovered their selfhood and began to articulate and develop Christianity in their own Idoma concrete historical, cultural context and situations.⁵³ In given western-dominated structures within which the Idoma church grew, it is clear that the Methodist missionary policies in general and Archbishop Achigili’s contribution in particular, played an important part in the reshaping and development of the Idoma Christianity which emerged. Achigili’s influence on the Idoma church may be seen mainly from his general attitudes toward the gospel and the Idoma culture. He argued and worked for the relating of Christianity to the Idoma culture, religious beliefs and past values. Achigili’s concern with Idoma Christianity that reflected the traditional Idoma values can be seen in several points in our discussion. These include the inclusion of the community Elders in the leadership of the Church

⁵¹ See chapter 7, p. 277 ff.

⁵² K.S Latourette, “Indigenous Christianity in the Light of History”, *International Review of Missions*, 1925, p. 440.

⁵³ See chapter 6 & 7.

and the establishment of a local Bible school for the training of indigenous church workers. Others are his earlier role as a member of the Idoma Bible translation team, and later as the overall chairman of the Idoma Bible Committee, the adaptation of *egɔ* as the social aid group for the church.⁵⁴ The introduction of Idoma indigenous music with the Idoma musical instruments in the worship of the church, and the inclusion of certain rites of passages in the liturgical pattern of the church in Idoma.⁵⁵

In this direction, we noted the adaptation of certain Idoma customs and cultural practice and rituals by the church in Idoma to express the Christian message, namely: child naming ceremony, marriage and burial rites. These, we argued, the church adapted in order to translate itself into the Idoma context, thus making it Idoma Christianity and not an alien faith.

We also examined the liturgical life of the Idoma church that enabled Christianity to take root in the soil of the Idoma culture in which it is planted, and how it grew in structure and as an institution on its own and not something alien. We concluded our discussion with some specific effect of the Bible translation on the Idoma Christianity. We argued that these were responsible for the later cultural, theological and liturgical developments of the Idoma Christianity.⁵⁶

Finally, we observed in this thesis that, for many years Idoma Christians were made to deny their cultural heritage. Their children at mission schools were forced to acculturate into the so-called 'Christian culture', which was predominantly the

⁵⁴ See chapter 7, p. 282-283.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 284 ff.

‘western’ culture.⁵⁷ They were prohibited from speaking the Idoma language at schools⁵⁸ and were looked down on because of diet and sometimes ridiculed for their physical characteristics. To become a Christian in Idoma is to give up your indigenous name for the so-called European biblical name, as though, God does not know what he was doing when he gave us Idoma names.

The process of forced acculturation was however resisted in Idoma Christianity by adapting and re-shaping Christianity as an indigenous institution, which enabled the Idoma tradition, language, and values to survive in Idoma Christianity.⁵⁹ For example, the Bible had to be re-translated, worship pattern changed, Idoma music and musical instruments brought into the worship life of the Church, rites of passages were brought into Idoma Christianity.⁶⁰ All these made Christianity to effectively translate into the Idoma life, culture and tradition.

We advocated in this thesis that conversion to Christianity, by the Africans; the Idoma people in particular or any other group of persons, must be coupled with their cultural continuity. It is therefore mandatory in the Idoma situation for the various facets of Idoma context, which make up the total Idoma primal religious and cultural experiences to be drawn into a coherent and meaningful pattern that can be called and described as Idoma Christianity.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See chapter seven.

⁵⁸ See chapter 5.

⁵⁹ See chapter 6 & 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

It could be claimed that Idoma Christianity is a distinctive cultural expression of Christianity in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria, which has made some positive contribution to mission scholarship, the reception and development of Christianity in West Africa and African Christianity as a whole, and western Christianity. For example, Idoma Christianity can serve as a mirror for the critical self-understanding of the western Christians. The Idoma Christianity has given the western Christians a vision of themselves from their cultural milieu.

Secondly, Idoma Christianity has offered models of authentic contextualization to mission scholarship. They have offered from their examples: e.g., birth, marriage and burial, an authentic process that would make church and theology in Africa critically responsible to the cultural and contextual issues of any society. What World Christianity needs today is not an artificial form of uncritical contextualization, but an authentic process that will make the church and theology and mission responsible for the fundamental issues of the society and the place to witness such a process today is in the Idoma situation. Idoma Christianity may not be able to provide the big finance and personnel required for mission scholarship today, but they can provide models of critical insertions in their culture and society that have given prophetic depth to their life and witness.

Idoma Christianity offers a partnership for radical discipleship. This, Idoma Christianity did by embarking on a radical course even to the very root of biblical faith and to the philosophical foundation of the Idoma cultural milieu.

As a result of the distinctive character of Idoma Christianity, and its size, the Idoma church was able to make a significant contribution to the overall development of Christianity in Benue and in particular the Methodist Church Nigeria. For example, the nature of almost all the denominations in Idoma today is influenced by the pattern of the Idoma Methodism. The most obvious one is in the field of church music and dancing during worship. Although, the contribution of the written Idoma music is very limited, there is, however, a wide circulation of Idoma music in the Idoma churches today which, are retained in the mental power and memory of the Idoma Christians across all the denominations in Idomaland.

It was not my intention in this thesis to offer an alternative approach to mission scholarship, or a substitute to other approaches, such as historical or thematic approaches, but rather to call attention to an approach which takes seriously the culture, language and religious beliefs of a given people as essential components of their reception and development of Christianity. I advocated an approach, which takes seriously, the culture, religious beliefs, past values and the concrete historical situations in our discussion, which are believed to underlie the reception, and development of Christianity as discussed in this thesis. As we give persistent and painstaking attention to the cultural heritage from which the Idoma or any other group of persons have grown, we should come to a better understanding of those people, and thereby become aware of the kind of response the new Christian situation demands: both the roles of churches and missionaries in the new situation as they seek new and better avenues of service to God among those people.

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Mr. J Attah, 70 year- Village Elder, Ugboju, 18th August 1997.

Mr. S Ogaba Attah, 42 years local Government Councillor, Agila, 18th August, 1997.

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Rev. Dr. E. Igwe, IdϷma New Testament Translator, First Nigerian

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Mrs. Grace Igwe, a pioneer teacher, Jesus College Otukpo, Hitchin, 14th July 1998.

Chief Ifere, the Ϸεεpa of Igwumale, District Head, and Lay Preacher in the Methodist Church, Igwumale, 29th August 1997.

Mr. Oogwu Obinya, 96 Year Old Otukpo Elder, IdϷma Oral Historian, IgboanϷηmaje, 9th July, 1982.

Mr. Oganyi. The oldest man in Ocobo, 15th August 1996.

Mr. E Ogbe, Iga Circuit Steward, 70 years old elder of the Church, Iga-Okpaya, 27th July 1997.

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Methodist Primary School Headteacher, Otobi, 21st August, 1997.

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and Secondary School Teacher, lay President diocese of the North & Conference
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JOURNALS*African Christian Studies**Africa Report**African Studies Review**Bulletin of the Society for African Church History**Ecumenical Review**International Bulletin of Missionary Research**International Missionary Council**International Review of Mission(s)**Japan Missionary Bulletin**Journal of Nigerian Association for the Study of Religion**Liturgical Review**Missionalia**Missiology**Presence**Religion**Religions**Religion and Reason**Samonda Bulletin**Scottish Journal of Religious Studies**Sierra-Leone Bulletin of Religion**Tarikh Historical Society of Nigeria**The Bible Translator (Practical)**The Bible Translator (Theory)**The Society of Malawi Journal**Theslogia Viatorum**Thinking Mission**West African Cultural Dynamics*